Why We Care About JFK Jr. NEAL GABLER, CHARLES LANE

THE NEW REPUBLIC

GORE'S GUCCI GULCHERS
DANA MILBANK, DAVID GRANN

IS COMMUNISM REALLY DEAD?
MICHAEL IGNATIEFF

August 9, 1999

American Pie

What to do with a $2.9 trillion surplus?

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SAVE IT
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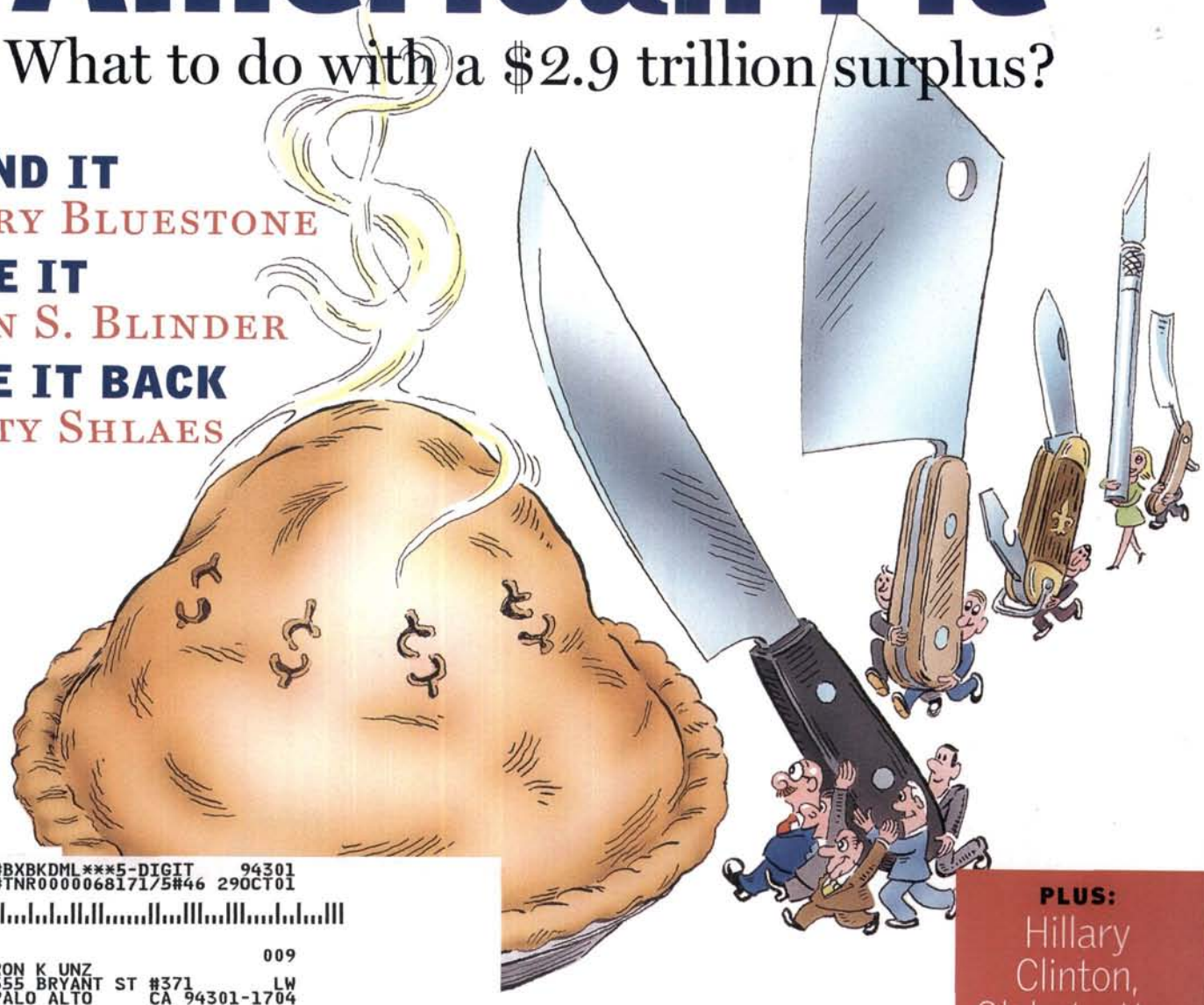
GIVE IT BACK
AMITY SHLAES



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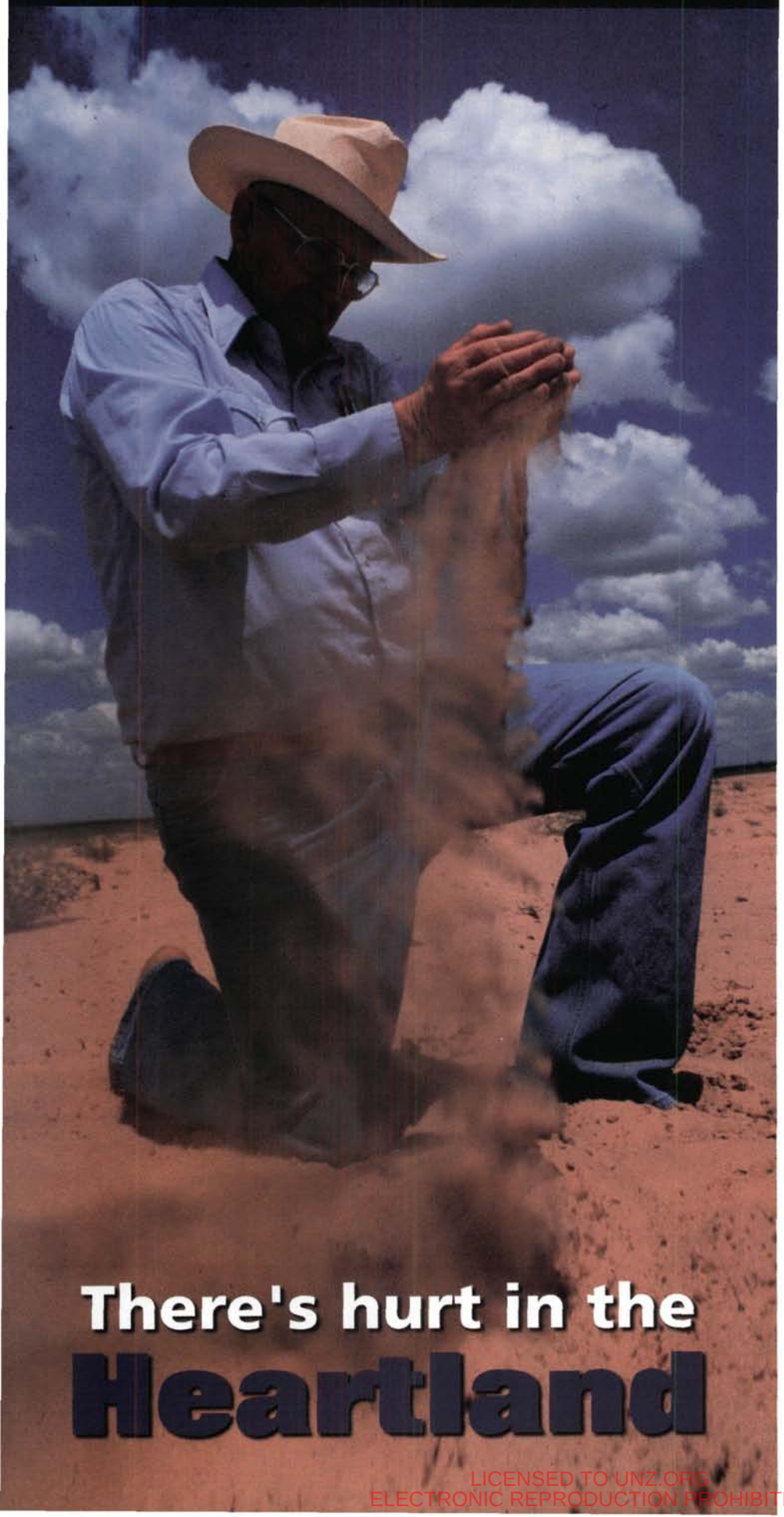
"Electricity price increases menace rural america."



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A Journal of Politics and the Arts

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CORRESPONDENCE

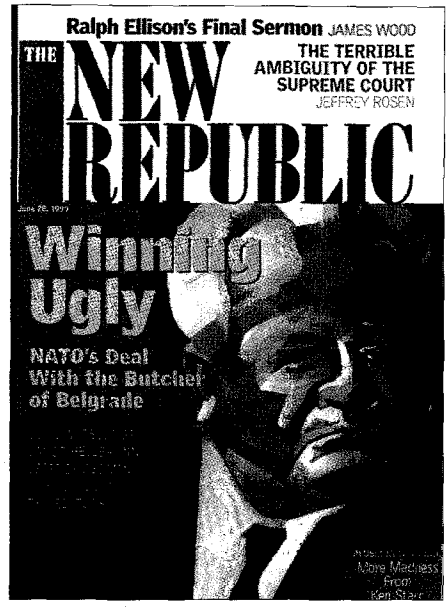
After Kosovo

TO THE EDITORS:
With great regularity and even greater sanctimony, men who are well past draft age, such as John B. Judis, demand that younger people give up their liberty and be prepared to kill strangers thousands of miles from home—in the name of "democracy" and "citizenship" ("Citizen Soldiers," June 28). From the draft's beginnings in the Civil War, when men could buy their way out of it, to the Vietnam era, when anyone who could afford college tuition also won a draft exemption, conscription has put an unfair burden of fighting, bleeding, and dying on the poor and minorities. The draft provided an unlimited pool of cannon fodder for three presidents in succession to wage an undeclared, immoral, racist war in Vietnam, which divided our nation and did vastly more to damage our Armed Forces, our government, and our leaders than today's "detached relationship" with the military and the government that Judis bemoans. It is not a coincidence that some confidence has been restored since we moved to an all-volunteer military—staffed by those whose decision to serve was made through free choice, not through coercion. That's truly a "democratic solution."

WILLIAM S. WEISS
Summit, New Jersey

TO THE EDITORS:
It is truly remarkable to what lengths TNR is willing to go to convince its readers that America should be a Lone Ranger power, riding to the rescue each time some ethnic minority rebels. With the possible exceptions of John B. Judis's call for a new military draft to encompass civilian projects and Jeffrey Gedmin's article on the European reaction to NATO's American leadership ("Continental Drift"), the rest of your June 28 cover-package writers—Jacob Heilbrunn ("Borderline Insanity"), Leon Wieseltier ("Winning Ugly"), and the editors ("Hard Bargaining")—all go around the bend in an attempt to show that America should be not only the Lone Ranger but, equally, a type of bullying superman, thrusting itself without fear of reprisal into the internal affairs of other nations whenever the spirit moves it.

Well, who decides when and where the United States should interfere—the president, Congress, your magazine? The articles all seem to imply that a policy of international morality is an adequate rationale for intervention. While it may be enough for TNR's contributors, I doubt very much that it is enough for their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THE NEW REPUBLIC
THE TERRIBLE AMBIGUITY OF THE SUPREME COURT
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Winning Ugly
NATO's Deal With the Butcher of Belgrade

countrymen, who may have to die for it.

W.H. RIDDELL
Tampa, Florida

Keeping the faith

TO THE EDITORS:
Jacob S. Hacker implies that expanding the role of religious organizations in the delivery of social welfare services is an idea that shouldn't be taken seriously ("Faith Healers," June 28). His critique is misguided at best.

Like most defenders of the status quo, Hacker misses the critical failure of top-down approaches. He overlooks the fact that, for more than 35 years, government has failed to combat generational poverty effectively. Government has been good at writing checks but bad at fostering community life. Employing faith-based organizations is an alternative worth pursuing, and, in time, the research methodology that Hacker desires will evolve.

Hacker wrongly believes that nonprofits will be the only providers of services, as if this were simply a conservative scheme to shrink government. In fact, no serious proposals aim to eliminate the role of government. The most thought-out idea, proposed several years ago by former Senator Dan Coats, does diminish government's role, but it empowers taxpayers to direct their dollars to the charities that work locally. Increased giving could replace some funding, and government would still have a role in shaping the underlying policy and providing quality control.

True, the lack of financial resources is a major problem, and it is no surprise that established nonprofits now contracting with the government are wary. However, studies have shown that tax credits for charitable giving increase the amount of donations, the number of donors, and the number of volunteer hours. Taxpayers, however, need an incentive. A poll last year commissioned by the Beacon Hill Institute showed that 59 percent of respondents in Massachusetts would increase their giving if government were to cut welfare spending. Sixty-eight percent said they would be inclined to give if government provided an incentive.

Competition between nonprofits benefits the consumers of such services. A welfare recipient could choose the nonprofit that best suits his or her day care, job training, and cash-assistance needs. These options aren't available in the current system.

Private religious and secular charities are untapped resources that can help ensure that welfare reform is a success. A charitable tax credit is the way to make the financing of those resources possible.

JOSEPH GALLANT
Beacon Hill Institute
Suffolk University
Boston, Massachusetts

JACOB S. HACKER REPLIES:
Joseph Gallant misunderstands my argument. I did not say that the faith-based agenda should not be taken seriously. I said that it should not be used solely as an excuse to cut public spending. And I argued that its advocates too often ignore the limits of charity and the extensive collaboration that already occurs between government and nonprofit organizations. Far from addressing my concerns, Gallant reinforces them. He calls charities "untapped resources." But, as I pointed out in my article, charities already rely heavily on government contracts. He acknowledges that resource constraints are a "major problem." Yet his only solution is to cut welfare to pay for new tax credits—a policy that will almost certainly increase the burden borne by charities in the poorest communities. Unfortunately, these arguments suggest to me that, for many proponents, the faith-based agenda is still more about downsizing government than about formulating a humane and effective antipoverty policy.

Ellison's triumph

TO THE EDITORS:
James Wood's review of *Juneteenth* ("The Writer and the Preacher," June 28) is muddled and sour. He chooses to read the book as an allegory but just glances at one simple symbolic possibility and fails to explain it clearly. This may be because he

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dislikes allegory, preferring, he says, realistic fictional characters who aren't bound by a single idea. But, if the book *is* an allegory, it's a more complicated, elegant one than Wood imagines, within which the protagonist Hickman's struggle with himself can easily satisfy a reader's desire for intricacies of character and personality.

Wood misses *Juneteenth*'s complexity because he ignores its oral dimensions. Reading the book aloud with others (or imagining ourselves doing so), we hear its realism and greatness in its talk—exhortation, funky humor, shaggy-dog stories, shameless hope, rhapsodic affirmation. Hickman isn't "windy," but rather speaks with the playfully hyperbolic redundancy of black friends conversing full tilt. Passages Wood sees as "homiletic, sentimental, and rhetorical" have comic, bluesy undertones he doesn't catch. What he calls failed stream-of-consciousness is often a colloquy a character is holding with himself.

In any case, why must Wood dismiss *Juneteenth* as a "commercial" effort? Ralph Ellison's brilliant moral, intellectual, and storytelling presence is worth meeting in any form. We should be grateful to the book's editor, John F. Callahan, for making a significant, coherent part of Ellison's final work available to all readers while a scholarly few await the release of the entire draft. Meanwhile, novelistic interpretations of *Juneteenth* are doomed because it isn't a novel. It's like nothing we've had before—a rocky, sometimes shaky island of visionary meditations, fables, dialogues, and dreams reclaimed from a great American writer's sea of manuscript. And it's no "mistake."

JUDY LIGHTFOOT
Seattle, Washington

TO THE EDITORS:

In his review of Ralph Ellison's *Juneteenth*, the usually astute James Wood claims that novels are "menaced" by affirmation of the kind this novel presents. I suggest that it is only critics who will suffer such distress, at least in this case. (Besides, the affirmation in *Juneteenth* is the furthest thing from unequivocal.) In *Juneteenth*, lovers of the American novel will savor the many excellences—including the singing of the American language, characters of individuated psychological complexity, and insights into race transformed into art—that Ellison uniquely provides.

Like all fine novels, whether "affirmative" or "negative," *Juneteenth* is a triumph and a joy and a challenge. John Callahan's only error was to be so generous with the grist he provided to his professional readers. In time, I'm sure that Wood will give the same kind of thoughtful reading to *Juneteenth* as he gave to *Invisible Man*.

BERNARD FREYDBERG
Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania

Residency requirements

TO THE EDITORS:

Joshua M. Sharfstein reminds us that sleep-deprived, chronically fatigued, and poorly supervised medical residents are a very significant cause of errors in treating hospitalized patients, leading to serious accidents, including death ("Asleep on the Job," June 21). However, his prescriptions for reform are naïve.

As he noted, in spite of the reform laws in New York state—which dictate, among other things, that residents may work only 24 hours at a time and no more than 80 hours a week—the state's more than 100 teaching hospitals have not been significantly reformed. This is because the fines for breaking the reform laws are paltry and, up until recently, state monitoring has not been vigorous. New York teaching hospitals also have received roughly $2 billion since 1989 to hire additional physicians, phlebotomists, nurse practitioners, physician's assistants, and other ancillary help in order to comply with these laws. This money was supposed to be categorical. But the hospitals' accounting methods made tracking the money difficult, and the funds were used for other purposes.

It is clear from the New York state experience that its teaching hospitals are above the law and incapable of reform when it comes to graduate medical education. Yet, in the 49 other states, teaching hospitals have failed even to consider rationalizing the working conditions and supervision of residents. Mistakes committed by resident physicians are recognized only when an egregious error leads to the death of a prominent person. Teaching hospitals have also failed to respond to the many attempts of the government to influence them substantially to change the physician workforce to meet public needs.

It is medical schools, not hospitals, that are responsible for the education of doctors. Furthermore, teaching is dramatically moving away from hospitals to an ambulatory setting. Rather than reimburse teaching hospitals for graduate medical education, it is time to consider giving the $10 billion per year for graduate medical education to the medical schools with very clearly enunciated policy goals. Teaching hospitals should do what they are best suited for: care for patients.

BERTRAND M. BELL, M.D.
Albert Einstein College of Medicine
New York, New York

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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

Gunsmoke

WHAT A RELIEF it was when a presidential candidate finally said the obvious about the National Rifle Association. The organization, Bill Bradley declared in June, should be "ashamed" of itself, adding: "It's about time to stand up to the NRA." Bradley was only giving voice to what every thoughtful person, including every thoughtful gun owner, knows to be true about the sickest major lobbying organization in American life. That it takes courage for a presidential candidate to utter such obvious thoughts is a sad commentary on the times.

Just how the NRA retains its stranglehold grows more puzzling each year. Polls show overwhelming voter support for stricter gun regulation. The National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, which has tracked public sentiment about firearms for most of the postwar era, has found that, consistently since the late '50s, about three-quarters of Americans have favored a permit requirement for all gun purchases. During the 1990s, support has spiked up further, with 85 percent today saying handguns should be registered. Not only do most Republican voters favor firearm regulation; 75 percent of gun owners, the center finds, now support handgun registration. Yet Congress, often accused of being hypersensitive to voter opinion, continues to defy the public on guns, seemingly more concerned with what the NRA thinks than what the body politic thinks.

It can't be that the NRA controls Congress through campaign donations, as is often charged; its funds represent but a tiny fraction of total spending to influence politics. And, even if the NRA's membership claims are true, only one percent of Americans belong to this mini-minority. The supposedly awesome NRA ballot-box power is mainly hype. Many Democrats quake before the organization because they believe its machinations cost the party control of the House in 1994. But Democrats gained seats in 1998 against a similar NRA offensive, suggesting that 1994 was about something other than guns.

Sheer virulence is probably what makes the NRA so strong; no major interest group is less civil or more eager to denounce. But the tobacco lobby once seemed invincible, and look what happened to it. There's every reason to hope that the NRA's political power will subside, making rational firearm regulation possible. Important in this regard is the 1998 victory of Gray Davis as governor of California. Davis, a gun-control proponent, replaced Pete Wilson, who had vetoed an assault-weapons bill. Davis won by a 20-point margin, and he just signed into law the country's strongest state-level gun-control bill. The Republican Party's loss of its previous sway over California may ultimately be traced to its quivering adherence to the NRA line.

After Columbine High, NRA drones in the House defeated a proposal whose main effect would have been to impose on gun-show sales the same background-check provision that already exists, via the Brady Bill, at gun stores. The NRA claimed such checks cause onerous delay. Set aside the question of who, other than a person who means to harm, so urgently needs a gun that he can't stop by the next day to pick up his purchase. (Delay between the purchase and delivery of a car, for example, is standard.) Like so many NRA claims, the onerous delay business is simply a lie. Some 90 percent of those who apply under the Brady law get approval within two hours. Most delays happen when there are crimes in a person's record, and "those are the people you want to have inconvenienced when they buy guns," notes New York Representative Carolyn McCarthy. The wisdom of the provision the NRA worked so desperately to block was demonstrated just days after the House vote, when Illinois murderer Benjamin Nathaniel Smith shot and killed two people before killing himself. Smith first tried to buy guns from a legitimate firearms store, where he was turned down for failing his background check. He then went to a no-check private dealer and walked out with two pistols.

Bradley's is the most sweeping gun-control package of any major presidential candidate in recent memory. He calls for, among other provisions, registering all handguns, including the 65 million already in circulation; requiring safety instruction and licensing for handgun owners; substantially increasing gun-dealer license fees to reduce the total number of dealers; mandating background checks at gun shows and trigger locks for all handguns; and banning Saturday night specials and other junk guns favored by criminals (junk guns are inaccurate, effective only if pressed against someone's temple, and designed to be thrown away as the gunman flees the scene). Bradley's proposals fall well within the scope of the Second Amendment, which allows that firearms be "well regulated." (Yes, there are several ways to interpret this modifier. See "Second Thoughts," by Akhil Reed Amar, TNR, July 12.) Equally important, the Bradley plan meets the test of social common sense. People who own guns should take responsibility for them by accepting something like the regime of responsibility imposed on automobile owners—safety rules, operator licensing, and registration of the device itself.

Al Gore's gun-control proposal, though less striking than Bradley's, is also welcome. In announcing his package, the vice president shied from frontal criticism of the NRA; he did, though, have lots of harsh words for criminals, who have no lobby. Playing soft with the NRA might be smart political positioning, but it's not leadership. Gore's program is clouded by some of the same '90s-speak that fogs many of his otherwise commendable plans: for instance, he advocates "bringing a new sense of responsibility to our criminal justice system," whatever that means. Like Bradley, Gore would ban junk guns, improve background checks, and require gun locks. But he calls only for licenses for gun owners, not handgun registration. Gun licenses would be infinitely preferable to the current system; rather than submit to background checks that might be bungled, buyers would have to show their gun licenses up front. But gun-owner licensing without gun registration is a little like saying that, once people obtain a driver's license, they can take the plates off their cars and drive without insurance or tags.

Both Bradley's excellent proposal and Gore's good one sparkle in comparison to George W. Bush's next-to-nothing position. Bush opposes practically all firearm-regulation initiatives, including licenses and registration. As governor of Texas, he signed a bill legalizing concealed weapons. This isn't as bad as it sounds—most who "carry" under the law will be honest people worried about crime. But the Texas approach seeks to counter the problem of easy criminal access to guns by increasing the firepower of the law-abiding. Better to address the core problem by making guns harder for lawbreakers to get and harder for anyone to deny responsibility for. A clear preponderance of Americans believe firearms should be "well regulated." Only crooks, the NRA, and the soul-for-sale types of the political world feel otherwise. Just which of these groups, exactly, does Governor Bush wish us to associate his name with?

GREGG EASTERBROOK

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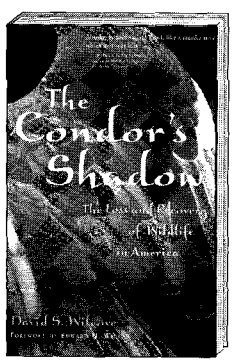

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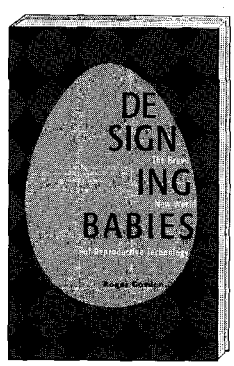

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Susan Engel

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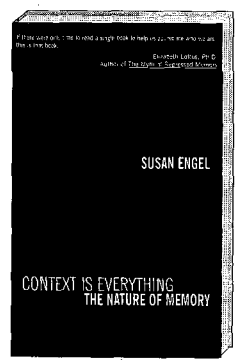
—W. D. Wetherell, author of *North of Now: A Celebration of Country* and *The Soon to Be Gone*



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CAMPAIGN JOURNAL

Tony the Tiger

MY FIRST ENCOUNTER with Tony Coelho, Al Gore's frenetic campaign chairman, occurred during the vice president's announcement tour in June. Coelho was on the press plane, gesticulating wildly to a group of reporters, shouting in their faces, and looking as if he might burst a blood vessel. "That man," one reporter remarked, "is going to explode."

Coelho's friends worry about his health. He works 16-hour days after rising for a workout each morning; his beach house in Delaware goes unused. He takes phenobarbital for epilepsy, he tells me, but he's still a blur of motion. "The joke is what I would be like if I didn't take it," he says.

Some inside the Gore campaign, after working under Coelho's frantic management for two months, would like to increase his dosage. In his first day on the job, he made Al Haig-style calls to key Democrats to assert his control over the Gore 2000 apparatus. Since then, he's been hiring consultants who are rivals of Gore's existing consultants, causing internal strife in a campaign that, just a few months ago, bragged about its harmony. A micromanager, Coelho supervises his minions down to the last semicolon, even deciding what color suit Gore should wear, leaving staffers feeling powerless. He's also reputed to be a screamer, and his list of people to fire, the existence of which is officially denied but privately believed in by Gore's aides, has spread pervasive fear.

There's a notion that Coelho, a sort of start-up chairman, will tire himself out and turn over the reins to another, white-knight chairman after the primaries. But, for now, Coelho's grip seems firm. His message to those who don't like his style: Get used to it. "The issue isn't whether people are happy or upset," Coelho says during an interview in his K Street campaign office. "This doesn't have anything to do with whether people think I'm treating them right or wrong. I'll do whatever I have to do to make sure Al wins.... It's not about me. It's not about any consultant or staffer. Who cares if they get along?" Got that, everybody?

Coelho seems to see those who question his style as disloyal to Gore. "You really have to understand why I'm here," he says. "I'm doing it pro bono. I'm committed one hundred percent to Al getting elected. My commitment isn't for people to like me."

Coelho's attitude does make some sense. The Gore operation had been in need of a jolt when he came aboard; it needed some bold decision-making and risk-taking to relieve it from terminal caution. He's brought clarity and organization to a campaign that was, by some measures, drifting. And, though Coelho's command-and-control style builds resentment and demoralizes the staff, the campaign is short enough that the long-term effects may never be felt. Coelho's allies say the griping is inevitable as Coelho goes about selecting a half-dozen loyal deputies, who will probably be different from Gore's current top aides. There's also inevitable tension as the center of Gore-land shifts from the White House and a circle of high-powered friends to the campaign office.

But the 57-year-old Coelho is taking a huge risk. A demoralized staff that feels its own ideas don't matter won't show initiative. And Coelho's style leaves Gore's troops feeling insecure. Whatever the ultimate wisdom of Coelho's early moves, his tendency to make them secretly has undermined morale. Carter Eskew, whom Coelho hired to fill the James Carville role of message guru, was brought in without any prior discussion with adman Bob Squier, the man who would be most affected (and an archrival of Eskew's to boot). Coelho informed Squier the day before the news hit the street. Another adviser learned that some of his duties would be assumed by a new hire when he read it in a press account. Gore's vice presidential chief of staff, Ron Klain, was seemingly discredited in public by Coelho; now Klain is almost certainly headed for the door (he cites family reasons), and Coelho seems to have realized, belatedly, that he needs Klain to stay.

The next shop due for some turmoil is Gore's polling operation. Already, the delicate balance of pollsters Mark Penn, Mark Mellman, and Paul Maslin was upset by Coelho's hiring of yet another pollster, Celinda Lake. (This for a campaign that already spent $228,644 on polling between April and June—one of the major reasons Gore has gone through a greater proportion of the money he's raised than either Bill Bradley or George W. Bush has.) Eskew's arrival diminishes the role of lead pollster Penn, and there's some gossip that Penn, who has stretched himself thin working for the president, the first lady, and Microsoft, may soon feel Coelho's wrath. If this happens, Coelho would find some support: Penn, who favors having Gore push a vast array of themes, is clashing with communications advisers, who think the candidate should focus on a few solid messages.

Coelho points out that fewer than one percent of voters know who he is, evidence that internal squabbles don't matter to the electorate. True, but a squabbling staff will be distracted from its task. And many of Gore's top lieutenants feel they have lost all power, while some of Gore's best workers obviously fear for their jobs. Though Coelho is a veteran strategist, his unchallenged judgment isn't always perfect. It was his decision to make Gore's official announcement of his candidacy in June, but the hoped-for bounce in the polls never happened. According to Gore consultants, Coelho brought in outsiders to do the advance work in Carthage, Tennessee, and the event was a debacle: faulty sound, posters between the TV cameras and the candidate's face, even AIDS protesters in the VIP section. Now the campaign has delayed formulating Gore's themes because Eskew won't be ready to roll the message machine until September.

The good news for Coelho is that his problem is largely a matter of style, not substance. With a smoother bedside manner, friends and opponents agree, he could probably get the job done. If he were to lighten up a bit and give his underlings more autonomy, he could quiet the complaints. Coelho seems to grasp this. "I think it should change," he says. "I believe in giving people authority." Coelho himself says the campaign's condition wasn't all that bad to start with. "These people here are very qualified, capable folks," he says. "I'm pleased with the organization. If I weren't, I'd be firing people." (In fact, though Coelho hasn't fired anybody, George W. Bush just sacked his highly regarded spokesman, David Beckwith.) But, if Coelho really didn't believe the Gore operation was in crisis, why did he adopt crisis-style management?

Coelho tells his staff that his decision to hire warring advisers stemmed from his stewardship of the House Democrats' elections in 1986, when he brought in a variety of strong-willed advisers who often disagreed loudly. "By the force of Tony's personality and commitment, we all got along," says Tom Nides, a Coelho ally who worked at the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee in '86. The Democrats won big that year, and Coelho clearly hopes for a repeat with the Gore staff. If Coelho can calm and motivate his underlings, Gore could recover, as Bush did in '88. But, if Coelho can't stop the anxiety he's unleashed, the result may be a replay of Dole '96.

DANA MILBANK

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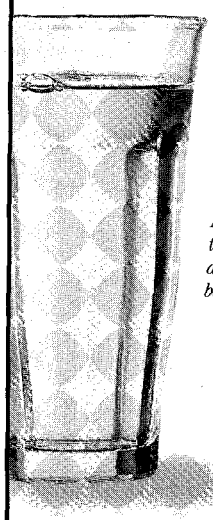

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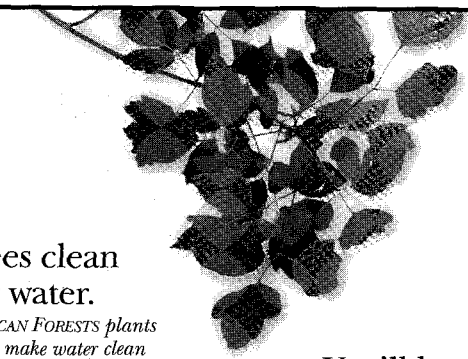

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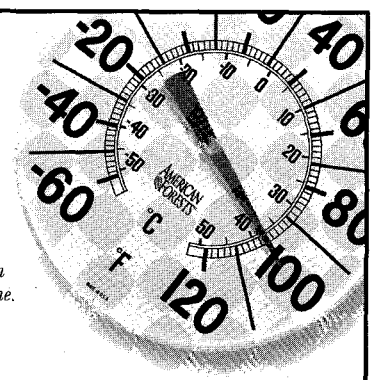

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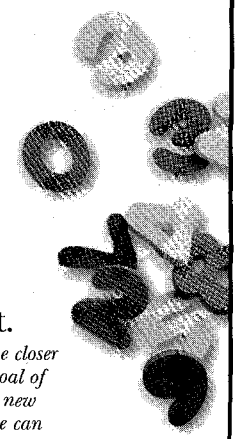

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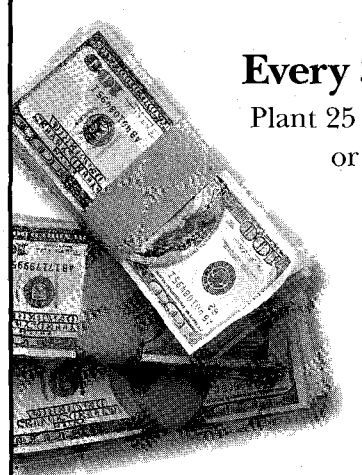

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Real Peace

LIKE "A KID with a new toy" is how Bill Clinton described his elation at the prospect of greeting Ehud Barak. It is well known that the president had no fun playing with his old toy, Benjamin Netanyahu; but the infelicity of his remark was not owed only to the incredible condescension that it expressed. What was really startling was the insouciance of Clinton's tone, his confidence that at last all the intractabilities of the Middle East would vanish and the idylls of the peace processors would become realities. As if Netanyahu and the Likud were all that stood between the region and peace. As if the Israeli leadership has helpfully fallen into line with the analysis of the Palestinian leadership. As if the political and strategic future of the Middle East depended solely on Israeli-Palestinian comity. As if justice after so much tragedy would be prompt, and even joyful.

But it was a useful remark, because it served as a timely reminder of the unsober nature of Clinton's notion of peace. The peace to which he kindles is a Shimon Peres kind of peace, not a Yitzhak Rabin kind of peace. The president appears to believe in a beautiful and complete deliverance, a comprehensive and virtually simultaneous resolution of all the outstanding fights and frictions between Israel and its neighbors, so that everything and everybody, Arab and Jew, will come together and hold together in a new era of calm and cooperation and commerce. (Especially commerce, which is the Clinton administration's answer to most conflicts.) A millennial peace, in sum. But Rabin's peace, the peace that was cobbled together at Oslo, the peace of the real world, was a decidedly unmillennial peace. It had no use for sentiment. It did not propose to undo the hardening effects of this long and savage conflict; it proposed to recognize them, and to build upon them. It was a peace in which moral dreams would have to answer to military scenarios; in which the standards of goodness would be judged by standards of security. Security, after all, is also a moral dream.

Barak is a man of peace, no doubt about it. He is unafraid of conceding land for peace. (Netanyahu, by contrast, peddled fear, and then wondered why he got no credit for Wye.) But Barak owes his recent landslide to many factors, and one of them was the obvious fact that his construction of peace is a dour construction. The candidate of the Labor Party proved so popular not least because he could not be mistaken for Peres. Barak is a proud disciple of Rabin, who was not quite the gorgeous dove into which he has been posthumously transformed. He was a remorselessly martial figure, who cared most passionately about his country's safety, and he never doubted that power was the only reliable foundation for peace. He was a man with the blood of Arabs on his hands, because he fought in wars of legitimate self-defense; and so, too, is Barak. That is why the Israeli population accepted Rabin's handshake with Yasir Arafat. It was his hawkishness that vouched for his dovishness.

The disappearance of tension between the American government and the Israeli government is a splendid development, but it must not be based on an illusion. Indeed, at various times during his visit to Washington, the Israeli prime minister seemed intent on politely disabusing the American president of his why-can't-we-all-get-along aspirations for the Middle East. He told the Americans that he did not welcome the almost bizarre level of intrusiveness that had characterized the American involvement in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in the Netanyahu years. Some of this micromanagerial diplomacy, particularly as it involved the CIA's role in arbitrating the smallest details of agreements, was designed to compensate for the breakdown in trust between Israelis and Palestinians; but Barak rightly pointed out that there is no substitute for trust. Israelis and Palestinians will work the problems out among themselves or the problems will not be worked out. And he pointedly refused to speak fraternally of Arafat, referring to him instead as a "partnerish rival," which seems precise.

There is also the question of a settlement with Syria. Barak has been extraordinarily forthright about his eagerness to conclude a peace with Syria, not least in order to unburden Israel of the slow torments of its deployments in Lebanon, which Syria owns. A peace with Syria has always been the fondest wish, and the most elusive prize, of American peace processors. (Warren Christopher was a frequent flyer to Damascus.) So it is important to be clear about what a peace with Syria will not be. It will not be a return to the 1967 borders, as Barak made clear last week. And it will not be an end to the historical hostility of the Syrian government toward Israel. For Syrian President Hafez al-Assad, a peace treaty will be a tactic for the restoration of territory; it will not be a strategy for the establishment of normal relations. Syria's arsenal of ballistic missiles is enough to give any Israeli planner pause; and Assad has already traveled to Moscow for the

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purpose of introducing some old-fashioned cold war intrigue into what Bill Clinton believes is a new-fashioned post-cold-war process. Why should Boris Yeltsin have anything in the world to do with what transpires between Israel and Syria?

So the euphoria of the Clintonites is preposterous, and if they persist in it in the months (the 15 months, according to Barak's timetable) leading up to the final status negotiations, their euphoria will quickly turn into exasperation, as they learn that an Israeli leader does not have to be Netanyahu to worry about the worst. Barak's practical reason must not be mistaken for prophetic idealism.

Still, not all the Clintonites are euphoric about peace. There is also the Clintonite—excuse us, the Clinton—who is running for Senate in New York. She was once euphoric about peace, to be sure; but now there are poll numbers with which to reckon, and the Jewish community of New York is not exactly a community of subscribers to *Tikkun*. The result has been quite a spectacle: while Bill Clinton has been pandering to Jewish doves, Hillary Clinton has been pandering to Jewish hawks. It turns out, all of a sudden, that she fervently hopes for the transfer of the American Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, which she fondly calls "the eternal and indivisible capital of Israel." With this courageous stand, she parts company with her husband, who has used a presidential waiver to prevent precisely such a transfer, which was mandated by Congress in 1995; but for the sake of Zion she will not be silent. It is only a matter of time before she vouchsafes to a reporter how deeply she has felt Jonathan Pollard's pain. ■

NOTEBOOK

IRON MIKE: Almost a year ago, Mike Barnicle was forced to step down from his columnist's perch at *The Boston Globe* after he was finally unmasked as what many readers had long suspected him to be: a plagiarist and a fabricator. (Barnicle denies the charges.) To be sure, this was not, unfortunately, the end of Barnicle's career in journalism. He remained a $150,000-per-year "contributor" to a Boston TV newsmagazine program. Drive-time radio listeners could still hear him once a week on his old friend Don Imus's show. And, in March, after a suitable hiatus from print, the New York *Daily News* hired Barnicle to write a Sunday column. But the death of John F. Kennedy Jr. has propelled Barnicle back into legitimacy on the national stage. With the networks and the 24-hour news stations giving JFK Jr.'s death the Princess Diana treatment, media bookers throughout the land are in search of just about anyone who can help fill all that airtime. Now, it's all Barnicle, all the time. Only hours after JFK Jr.'s plane was first reported missing, Barnicle, who vacations four blocks from the Kennedy compound in Hyannisport, popped up on CNN to chat with another one of his enablers in the media, Larry King. Identified by King as "the famed writer," Barnicle served up an insider's homily about the Kennedys' "faith in God [that] holds them up through these incredible, incredibly emotionally draining ordeals, when ordinary mortals, as you and I, would be crushed by the weight of this sadness. But they endure." The next morning, Barnicle was up bright and early to appear on NBC's "Meet the Press," hosted by another old chum, Tim Russert. There, Barnicle rejected any notion that JFK Jr. used poor judgment in flying his plane over water at night and instead blamed the crash on an "element of fate out there over the ocean that took this plane down. He could just as well have been killed in a subway accident in New York City as out on Vineyard Sound." That same day, Barnicle offered his Kennedy insights to National Public Radio, CBS's "60 Minutes," and NBC's "Dateline." NBC soon snatched him up as a paid "consultant" to serve as a talking head about the story. In one talk with Matt Lauer, Barnicle offered some speculation about Kennedy funeral plans, then shifted, without irony, into a lament about media overkill. "There's an element of Peeping Tomism here today that is getting bothersome.... It's getting troubling." Actually, the saturation coverage of this sad event is the best thing that's happened to Barnicle's career since his departure from the *Globe*. But, distasteful as the spectacle is, we don't really blame him for milking the opportunity. Instead, this is another occasion to reflect on the growing tension between the networks' voracity and veracity—and on the fact that, in this culture, there really is no such thing as permanent disgrace.

CROSSED WIRES: We received an e-mail from the Bradley campaign on July 21 announcing a "major policy address" for the following day. It seems that the candidate was about to "lay out specific proposals for reforming the campaign finance system to reduce the influence of money in politics." Hear, hear. As it happens, though, the very next e-mail to arrive from the Bradley campaign, two and a half hours later, contained evidence of how deeply enmeshed Bradley, like every other candidate, still is in the current system—a system that was part of what supposedly caused Bradley to conclude that American politics were "broken" and to depart the Senate in 1996. The e-mail, titled "Bill Bradley to Spend July 23-25 on Fundraising Swing Across Long Island, N.Y.," boasted that the planned weekend spree "comes just over a week after Bradley filed an impressive $11.7 million total with the Federal Election Commission." They don't call him Dollar Bill for nothing.

MAKE NO MISTAKE: Here's further evidence that truth is the first casualty of war, from the August 1999 issue of *Harper's*. "*Correction*: Due to an editing error in Noam Chomsky's essay, 'The Demolition of World Order,' in the June Readings section, the number of Kurds killed by the Turkish government was incorrectly inflated to 2,000,000. In fact, an estimated 37,000 Turkish Kurds have been killed since the early Nineties, while over 2,000,000 have been displaced from their homes. We regret the mistake." So, no doubt, do the Kurds. ■

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What JFK Jr. meant to America.

The People's Prince

By Neal Gabler

The tragedy that befell John F. Kennedy Jr., his wife, Carolyn, and her sister Lauren last week in the waters off Martha's Vineyard seemed eerily familiar—and not just because the alleged Kennedy family curse had descended yet again. It seemed familiar because the media used the occasion to reprise their saturation coverage of terrible events as different as the Columbine High School massacre and Princess Diana's death. Once again, we got the correspondents keeping watch over the family, taking the pulse of the public, and staking out the spontaneously erected memorial with its votive offerings. We got experts parsing the incident with the assiduousness of Talmudic scholars, the talking heads delivering encomiums, the proffered condolences and prayers from the first family, the solemn TV anchors groping for appropriately sententious expressions of sorrow. Only the names and places had changed.

Some Holocaust historians have argued that any representation of the Shoah necessarily trivializes the horror and that it is better left unrepresented, hence literally unimaginable. One might make the same case here: that reducing a public tragedy to a series of media conventions, a special-event TV extravaganza, similarly trivializes the event and converts the viewers, whether they realize it or not and whether they like it or not, into actors mourning for the cameras as part of a global festival of grief.

Still, the grief is no less real for the fact that it has been routinized, and I am sure that, if pressed, the media chiefs would claim that they provided this sort of wall-to-wall coverage precisely because the public needed a ritual through which to channel its pain. They may be right. JFK Jr.'s death clearly affected many Americans, myself included, in ways that seem profound and mysterious. Why he elicited these feelings, beyond the tragedy of a life cut short long before fruition and of a family repeatedly afflicted, is a question worth pondering—a question whose answer may tell us as much about ourselves as about JFK Jr.

To understand our reaction to him one must first understand that, inasmuch as he was a Kennedy, his name enabled him to enter another, even more powerful fraternity than the Irish Catholic political dynasty into which he was born: celebrity. At birth he was immediately dragooned into that national repertory company of the famous, and, like each of its members, he enacted an ongoing saga for us, recorded in the media. His education, his romances, his

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career plans, his bar exams, his designation by *People* magazine as the "sexiest man alive," and his marriage to Carolyn Bessette were all scenes for our viewing pleasure. Or, put another way, his life had become a movie, and he had become its star.

Moreover, the continuity of the movie over nearly four decades created for the public a sense of familiarity with its protagonist that was practically, well, familial. Like soap opera aficionados who weep at soap weddings and keen at soap funerals, the nation watched JFK Jr.'s own soap opera, suffered his tragedies, and relished his successes. In effect, by making his life so public, the media had, despite his own resistance, made him an intimate—"America's son," as Kennedy biographer Ed Klein referred to him on CNN's "Larry King Live."

BUT TO SEE JFK Jr. as a familiar celebrity commodity does not quite do justice to the Jungian force of his celebrity. The Greeks long ago appreciated the power of heroes to transmit values that could help one contend with the world. In Homeric times, myth was deemed the best vehicle to perform this function because life itself was thought to be too arbitrary, too artless. One of the things we have learned to do in this century, courtesy of celebrity journalism, is to take the arbitrariness of life and treat it as art. Thus the lives of celebrities—their affairs, divorces, illnesses, addictions, peccadilloes, binges, and epiphanies—become the modern equivalents of epics. And celebrities, more often than not, are the modern-day equivalents of mythic heroes.

But they are heroes in a very special sense. What classical heroes did was demonstrate man's possibilities and limitations. Joseph Campbell, in his famous study of cross-cultural myths, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, describes just how this process works by identifying three basic stages through which virtually all mythic heroes pass. They emerge from ordinary reality, enter a wondrous world where they undergo a series of trials, and then, having been transformed by the experience, they return to tell us what they have learned, making their heroism a function of both their deeds and their gifts to us. The hero, then, has to negotiate between the ordinary and the godly, the temporal and the otherworldly, keeping a foot in each camp so that he can show us how to adapt ourselves to a world that is half spiritual, half material—a world of wonder but also of pain.

This is almost exactly what celebrities like JFK Jr. do in contemporary culture. They emerge from our quotidian reality; they survive the celebrity maelstrom of romance, drugs, infidelity, media scrutiny, et al. into which they are plunged; and then they return, via the media, to tell us what they have learned there—usually the pacifying bromide that the benefits of celebrity are nothing compared to the benefactions of a good family, good work, and knowing who you really are. As a result, they provide us with something important, perhaps even necessary. They give us the vicarious thrill of the divine while reinforcing our sense of self-worth.

If this, in our culture, is an important job, it is also a tenuous one. Half god, half man, the celebrity, like the hero, is always poised between our identification with him, which makes him one of us, and our idolatry of him, which makes him better than we. If he lists too far in either direction, he loses his Olympian perch: too far toward the godly and we must reel him back in; too far toward the ordinary and we lose interest. Thus the constant push and pull between Oprah Winfrey's huge salary and her struggles with her weight, between Julia Roberts's great beauty and her botched romances, between Elizabeth Taylor's fame and her constant illnesses. In fact, the fascination most celebrities hold for us is the tension between these halves that becomes the plot points in their life movies.

For JFK Jr., the extremes were indeed extreme—the promise of his life and the tragedy of his death. Unlike most celebrities, he was born of gods—the son of an improbable marriage between the Apollo and Aphrodite of American politics and the grandson of the Zeus and Hera of twentieth-century America, Joseph and Rose Kennedy. Hubris, the bane of the classical hero and the occupational hazard of the modern celebrity, was in his blood, though in the case of the Kennedys the sense of ease and entitlement, the feeling that there were absolutely no limits to their dreams, presented itself less often as overbearing arrogance than as confident charm.

ONE SUSPECTS JFK JR. couldn't possibly have imagined that he wouldn't be able to fly safely through blackest night. Yet, while this utterly American and decidedly *under*-weening pride was a major factor in the Kennedy appeal, it was also an integral part of their drama—yin and yang all wrapped up in one package. Like Icarus, the Kennedys always seem to be flying close to the sun, teasing fate. And, watching them, we have always been caught up in the suspense of their enterprise. As they rise, they carry us with them to the highest highs until mortality pulls them back to earth and brings us to our lowest lows. It is as if the entire Kennedy family is a memento mori.

What made JFK Jr. so captivating was that he lived within this hubris, but what made him so endearing was that he clearly understood celebrity and the role he was compelled to play. From his father, he seemed to have inherited or intuited a kind of ironic detachment that let him survey the distance between the JFK Jr. of the media and the JFK Jr. of real life. He seemed to take pleasure in the idea that the former bore so little resemblance to the latter, and he was said to be honestly self-effacing, even self-deprecating, qualities not generally attributed to celebrities.

From his mother, JFK Jr. seemed to have been imbued not only with dignity at a time when many other celebrities were retailing their lives for profit, but also with a sense of the fatuousness of the whole celebrity circus. He was bemused by the idea that his life was a movie and that he was its star. That is the expression one sees in his photos: the look of barely stifled astonishment at the idiocy of his own celebrity. And it

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NEAL GABLER'S most recent book is *Life the Movie: How Entertainment Conquered Reality*.

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is the ironic metaphor of his death as well. A man who so clearly had his bearings in life most likely died by losing his bearings in the air.

His legacy, *George* magazine, is also his sly commentary on the public lust for celebrity. What JFK Jr. understood from his father's life and from his own was that even the sacrosanct church of politics had become another celebrity showcase, that politics was essentially entertainment and that what the electorate wanted was not ideology or policy but excitement. In short, he established *George* at the very junction where he himself lived since the day he was born—the junction of celebrity and politics.

If this makes JFK Jr. the first postmodernist politico in America, the first to discover that politics is inseparable from popular culture, it is certainly apt. He was not, in the old Kennedy mold, a political hero come to smite social ills. He was a famous young man who graciously accepted center stage without ever forgetting it was a performance we wanted and a performance he was, however reluctantly, obligated to give. ■

Being first lady has its perks.

Jet-setter

By SETH GITELL

NOW THAT HILLARY CLINTON has formed a Senate campaign exploratory committee to pay for her increasingly frequent trips to New York, the issue of her use of taxpayer money to underwrite travel relating to her Senate bid seems to be off the table. Or is it? While Republicans continue to harp on the estimated $220,000 the first lady spent on eleven trips to New York from January to July, they're overlooking what is sure to be a crucial component of any Hillary Clinton campaign for elected office: her taxpayer-funded international travels, past and future.

In the 19 months since the Monica Lewinsky scandal first exploded, Hillary Clinton has taken eight foreign trips without her husband. These trips, which were normally taken aboard an Air Force Boeing 707 and almost always included the first lady's aides and full security detail, were paid for by the State Department. The total cost of the trips is not available, but it presumably exceeds the $220,000 bill for the first lady's recent trips to New York. In 1998, the first lady visited Switzerland (twice), France, Chile, Uruguay, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Nicaragua, Honduras, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Guatemala. This year, she has been to the Netherlands, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Ireland, Northern Ireland, England (for a conference on "hearing children's voices"), and Macedonia (where she consoled Kosovo refugees).

Before the scandal, her international travel highlights included trips to Princess Diana's funeral in England, Mother Teresa's funeral in India, and the United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing, not to mention her 1996 voyage to Athens, when, as Ken Starr reported, Monica and Bill took advantage of her absence. As of this May, Clinton had taken more than 20 trips abroad to 66 countries sans husband. By contrast, neither Barbara Bush nor Nancy Reagan took more than three international trips without her husband. At least four of the first lady's trips—two to Belfast, one to Vienna, and one to Montevideo, Uruguay—have been made for the purpose of attending conferences sponsored by an organization called Vital Voices, a kind of movable talking shop on women's issues that has received funding from private corporations, the State Department, and the first lady's own office.

The first lady's spokeswoman, Marsha Berry, contends that the trips are vital to Clinton's mission of promoting democracy around the globe. "She travels at the request of the president and the secretary of state," says Berry. "These trips have been very advantageous for the country. Many [of the places she visits] are emerging democracies or struggling democracies or ones that have been successful, and she is rewarding their efforts." To be sure, Clinton's trips abroad, unlike her jaunts to New York, aren't directly related to her Senate campaign—and, indeed, many of the trips were taken before she even thought of running for Senate. But she can and will exploit foreign travel in her Senate bid now.

Take the May trip to Ireland and Northern Ireland, ostensibly to take part in a Vital Voices conference. In Galway, upon receiving an honorary degree from the National University of Ireland, the first lady used the opportunity to wax eloquent about the strong bond between Ireland and America. Clinton told the crowd, "One must think here in Galway of all those men and women and children who began their journey to what they called the 'New World' in ships sailing from this port"—and who, by Clinton's good fortune, have descendants who now vote in New York.

CLINTON ALSO REFERS to her travels on the stump back home. In a May speech to the American Jewish Committee (AJC), an audience packed with wealthy potential donors, the first lady spoke of her 1996 solo trip to Bucharest, Romania, during which she and the then-ambassador to Romania, AJC honcho Al Moses, met an impoverished girl whose hands were deformed. Clinton praised Moses, who later had arranged to have American doctors perform surgery on the girl. Then the first lady went on to laud the AJC for its commitment to human rights, the results of which, she was happy to note, she had witnessed firsthand at all those conferences she'd attended. "I've seen it in Geneva, I've seen it in New York, I've seen it in Beijing," she said. She went on to talk about her visits to Jewish communities in Ukraine, Poland, and even Uzbekistan.

Indeed, the first lady's ostensible role as the administra-

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tion's goodwill ambassador represents one of the few tangible accomplishments she can point to from her White House years. The U.S. Agency for International Development has gone so far as to make the first lady its de facto poster girl, filling its office lobby with pictures of the first lady abroad. One snapshot shows Hillary Clinton, in sleek sunglasses, watching a woman spin thread in Asia. Another shows the first lady and Chelsea Clinton wearing ornamental tribal neckwear, surrounded by African women. Still another image is of Clinton leaving the ornate parliament of a Latin American nation. Clinton and babushkas in an Eastern European marketplace. Clinton and a Masai warrior. How can a crime-fighting mayor of New York City compete?

With Clinton now spending so much time traipsing around New York, though, it's likely that she'll have to curtail some of her international travels. But sometimes the president or the secretary of state will make such an urgent request of the first lady that she'll have no choice but to make a trip abroad. Promoting democracy is far more important than her own political ambitions. Surely that's why, later this summer, Clinton plans to take a break from her Senate campaign to visit Israel. ■

The trouble with teacher's aides.

Failing Grade

By JONATHAN FOX

KATI HAYCOCK REMEMBERS the first time she witnessed what happens to be a disturbingly frequent act of educational malpractice. Ten years ago, on a tour of remedial reading classes at a mostly Hispanic elementary school in San Jose, California, Haycock saw a woman reading to a small group of students enrolled in a federally financed program. The woman "mispronounced every fifth word, and the kids were mispronouncing the same words," recalls Haycock, director of the Education Trust, a group that fights to improve education for poor children. "The children were being read to by what can be described as a barely literate individual."

That barely literate individual was a teacher's aide—one of 77,000 such aides whose salaries are paid for by the government's $8 billion Title I program, the biggest, oldest, and most politically popular chunk of federal education funding. Launched with high hopes during the Great Society era, Title I has sought to close the achievement gap between poor and affluent children. But, aside from some test-score gains by minority students in the 1970s and '80s, it has largely failed. The good news is that the Clinton administration has proposed rectifying one of Title I's more serious flaws. The bad news is that a rather odd de facto coalition of teachers' unions and congressional Republicans stands in the way.

That flaw is the use of $1 billion in Title I money, given by the federal government to low-income schools, to hire undereducated teacher's aides, also known as "paraprofessionals" or "paras." The idea behind hiring teacher's aides is that they will handle the educational grunt work—such as supervising recess, recording grades, and preparing materials for instruction—thereby freeing up teachers to pay more attention to classroom instruction. More often than not, however, these aides end up actually teaching children. Although Title I guidelines strictly define the aides' instructional responsibilities—limiting them to individually tutoring children on basic or already-covered material—a recent Department of Education survey found that most teacher's aides said they taught or helped teach nearly every subject; some school officials even admit to using aides as substitute teachers. Similarly, despite Title I guidelines stipulating that teachers must supervise their aides, 76 percent of aides surveyed said they had taught students without a teacher present.

None of this would be a problem, of course, if Title I aides were qualified to teach, but most of them—the vast majority of whom work in urban classrooms—are not. According to the Department of Education, only ten percent of aides in high-poverty schools have bachelor's degrees. The reason so many urban aides lack basic educational qualifications is that, in many urban areas, hiring teacher's aides is not so much about helping children as it is about providing $17,000-a-year jobs to poor, minority women.

ADVOCATES FOR TEACHER'S aides contend that, since the teaching force is predominantly made up of middle-class white women, Title I aides—who are more likely to be minorities who live in the same impoverished neighborhoods where they work—play a vital role in urban schools. Aides "have a special understanding of students' lives and circumstances," says American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Sandra Feldman, whose organization counts aides and other support staff as its fastest-growing constituency. "Often they provide stable and loving relationships for children for whom such relationships are rare."

Unfortunately, though, these stable and loving relationships don't appear to have much bearing on student performance. A recent Department of Education reanalysis of Title I data from the late '80s found "no positive impact" for students in classes with aides. Similarly, the vaunted Tennessee Student/Teacher Ratio (STAR) project—a $12 million study that, beginning in 1985, tracked the academic progress of more than 11,000 children from kindergarten through third grade—found that, while students in small classes outperformed their peers in large classes, students in large classes with aides generally did no better than their peers in large classes without aides. In the STAR study, students in classes with aides performed slightly better in kindergarten through second grade than those in similarly sized classes without aides, but the differences weren't statistically significant except for in first grade. By third grade, however, stu-

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dents in classes with aides performed slightly worse than students in classes without aides. The STAR researchers ultimately concluded that aides had no impact on learning. "The evidence is pretty damning and conclusive that traditional uses of aides are not beneficial for children," says Robert E. Slavin, a Johns Hopkins University professor of education and an expert on low-income schools.

FACED WITH THIS growing body of research and a 1994 shift in Title I's focus from providing students with remedial instruction to helping students meet more challenging state standards, the Clinton administration is seeking to reform the process of hiring teacher's aides. In the coming months, Congress must reauthorize the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act—the piece of legislation that created Title I. And the administration has proposed that new Title I legislation include the requirement that, by mid-2002, classroom aides paid through Title I have at least two years of college education. Under the plan, aides without two years of college can serve as translators, librarians, or parent liaisons—they can even get assistance to earn a college degree—but they can't help Johnny learn. "We can't have people who are totally untrained teaching students who need the best teachers," explains Marshall Smith, acting deputy education secretary.

While the administration didn't go as far as some in the education community would have liked—the Education Trust, for instance, thinks four years of college should be the rule—it's not surprising that both the National Education Association and the AFT oppose the proposed requirements, even in their scaled-back form. "It is clear that aides provide an enormous benefit when they supplement the teacher's lesson plans," even aides without college experience, contends AFT spokeswoman Celia Lose, whose organization wants more training for paraprofessionals.

What is surprising, however, is that congressional Republicans are not yet throwing their full support behind the stricter education requirements for classroom aides. While Republican staffers say they hope to include an education requirement for classroom aides in the GOP bill to reauthorize Title I, most congressional Republicans simultaneously support what they call a "Straight A's" plan, by which governors would have the option to waive all rules and enter into five-year performance contracts with the Department of Education. The "Straight A's" plan, which seeks to abolish federal education requirements altogether, would seemingly be in direct conflict with the Clinton plan to strengthen one of those requirements.

Although the "Straight A's" plan would give governors the freedom to experiment and set their own priorities, it would also allow them to repeat some of their previous mistakes: governors, for instance, have made no effort in the past to set educational requirements for teacher's aides, and, given the heightened power of teachers' unions at the state level, it's doubtful they'll do so in the future. Moreover, the time for experimentation is running out. "How long do these kids have to wait for us to inch so slowly upward?" asks Haycock. "Why do these kids have to wait for us to do what research says we should do?" ■

Why the euro's bad for Europe.

Funny Money

By RICHARD OLDFIELD

IT'S BEEN JUST seven months since the European Union adopted a single currency managed by a single central bank. But the problems inherent in this arrangement have already begun to emerge. In the spring, Oskar Lafontaine, Germany's finance minister, resigned after clashing with the German chancellor and the chairman of the European Central Bank, Wim Duisenberg, over Duisenberg's management of Europe's monetary policy. The trouble: Germany's economy is weak. But the European central bankers appear to have been far more concerned with the weakness of the euro. So they have been unwilling to take the necessary measures—such as cutting interest rates—to help stimulate Germany's economy, fearing that they will drive down the euro's value still further. To the amazement of most observers, Duisenberg even hinted last week that interest rates might be raised.

It is foolish for the central bankers to equate the success of the euro with that of the European economies. After all, currencies fluctuate. And Americans do not regard a spate of dollar depreciation as a stain on their economic virility. But the Europeans, having set short-term currency strength as a test of success, have not only failed their own misguided test but also failed in their responsibility to help provide noninflationary growth in Europe.

This cloud will pass; some think the euro is already starting a phase of recovery. But the past few months have illustrated the fundamental contradictions implicit in a structure in which the central bank is independent not only of any single country's politicians but also of any single country's citizens.

Of course, in any country in which the central bank is independent, rows occur from time to time between the finance minister and the central bankers. But, within a single country, all parties can at least find comfort in the fact that each has a common frame of reference. The European Central Bank is unique in that it is not balanced by a group of politicians of stature who operate within the same boundaries. The bank's territory is Europe. The territory of the politicians is each one's own nation-state. And, while the president of the European Central Bank is answerable, ultimately, to the governments of the eleven countries whose currencies have been subsumed in the euro, these governments have no single interest but, rather, eleven different interests.

Their economies vary: for example, France, with its heavy

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agricultural emphasis, remains quite different from Germany, which emphasizes industry. The economic cycles of the 15 members of the EU are also different. While Germany now languishes, Ireland is in the midst of a boom. The boom started with a combination of a farsighted tax policy designed to encourage inward investment and, ironically, the munificence of the EU, which doled out vast subsidies to enable Ireland, one of the poorer countries in the union, to build roads and motorway bridges. For the past several years, the Irish economy has been booming, with close to eight percent growth in the past year. House prices have shot up. Consumer prices, already on the rise, are likely to go up a good deal further.

The Irish government is powerless to do anything about this because it must live with the interest rates set for the euro by the European Central Bank. Under the current circumstances, it seems likely these will remain low—and, given the weakness of the largest economy in Europe, they may indeed go lower. So, after a little more boom, a bust is inevitable: as domestic prices rise, the balance of trade will go badly into deficit, and finally unemployment will go up as demand for Irish goods, from domestic or international sources, hits the rocks. At that point the government will appeal for more money from the Cohesion Fund of the European Union, and the whole cycle can begin again.

Proponents of the euro point to the United States as proof that divergences in economic performance between one region and another can be self-correcting. In the United States, if jobs are hard to find in a region that is experiencing a recession, people move to an area where prospects are brighter. But American workers have an advantage over their European counterparts: no matter where they move, the language will remain the same. Meanwhile, even within many EU countries, language remains an obstacle to mobility. In Belgium, the Flemish- and French-speaking populations find it hard to understand each other. In France, words introduced from America or the U.K. are officially outlawed. A true euro enthusiast should, to be consistent, embrace the concept of a common language—the most logical choice being English. However, a camel would go through the eye of a needle a good deal more easily than the nations of Europe would agree to the demotion of their languages. Even the most zealous euro enthusiasts recoil from such a ghastly prospect.

The unwillingness of Europeans to contemplate a single European language demonstrates just how flawed and flimsy the sense of community and integration in the EU really is. It also makes it extremely unlikely that divergences among the economic patterns of different countries can be dealt with through large-scale labor migration. That leaves large-scale bailouts by the EU, financed by collecting funds from its richer members, as the only real instrument for correcting the economic disparities that will occur when euro interest rates are at the right level for some countries and the wrong level for others. And institutions, particularly new ones, that rely on continuous sacrifice by some of their members do not tend to last long. ■

Kosovo Dispatch

Breathing Room

By Samantha Power

PRISTINA

The news reports emanating from Kosovo these days are grim: mass graves are unearthed daily, hundreds of villages have been flattened, and the retreating Serbs looted so thoroughly that they plucked even the outdoor basketball rims from Albanian homes. Compounding the difficulties of rebuilding, the entire Serbian state apparatus disappeared overnight, leaving schools, hospitals, utility companies, car factories, post offices, courts, and local government without management. Still, whatever the dire political and material condition of Kosovo's ethnic Albanians, their respiratory condition has improved dramatically—for the first time in a generation, Albanians insist repeatedly, "We can breathe again." Gone are the checkpoints, the strip searches, and the deprivations of the Serbian apartheid regime. Kosovar youths dance the night away without fear of reprisal. Albanian laborers who were fired during Slobodan Milosevic's 1989 purge are returning to their jobs and reclaiming their old offices. Those who are rebuilding their homes—so far, mainly those who have received help from family abroad—are doing so with the faith, if not yet the sturdy confidence, that this time their investments will be lasting.

For these newfound liberties, Kosovo's ethnic Albanians are as grateful to NATO as they are to their beloved Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). While many American observers retain an uneasy sense that, by launching air strikes, NATO actually spurred the Serbs to commit more atrocities than they would have otherwise, the Kosovar Albanians—even those who lost everything in the Serbian counterattack—register no such qualms. They date the beginning of the war in Kosovo not to March 24, 1999, when the air strikes began, but to February 1998, when Serb units committed their first massacre of Kosovo civilians. That was when life went from unpleasant to unbearable; that was when years of humiliation darkened into fears of extermination. "You must understand that the value of individual life in Kosovo before the bombing was zero. The Serbs were the owners of our lives," explains Blerim Shala, editor of the weekly newsmagazine *Zeri* and a member of the Kosovo delegation to the Rambouillet peace talks. "When you reach that bottom line, you don't care about the consequences of freedom.... In the

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mind of ordinary Albanians, it was better to die than to live under Serbia."

But herein lie the seeds of a problem that may soon erode the Albanians' current love of their multinational rescuers. One of the main reasons people sacrificed was that they believed they were struggling for independence. For now the power vacuum created by the flight of the Serb regime and the lethargic arrival of the new U.N. civil administration allows them the freedom they had long coveted. But it may prove as short-lived as it is sweet.

In contrast to Bosnia, for example, where the international "high representative" issues occasional directives but where local authorities make most policy, in Kosovo the 5,000 international civilian officials expected to arrive in the coming weeks intend to actually *serve* in the local government. According to U.N. planners, they will be the ones who administer the police, education, public health, utility, communication, taxation, and reconstruction institutions, while Albanians, Serbs, and others will work as employees and serve as "consultants" on a transitional council. Senior U.N. officials are even considering the unprecedented: having the United Nations itself impose duties on incoming fuel and commercial traffic and levy taxes inside the province—money that the U.N. will in turn use to pay the salaries of hundreds of thousands of "state" (read: U.N.) employees. This approach has the virtue of bypassing Belgrade, of course. But it also has the defect of bypassing the ethnic Albanian community. And, though many Albanians say they are willing to wear training wheels for a while, they have run efficient shadow institutions for so long that they will likely recoil under U.N. constraints.

Already some Albanians have begun to take notice—griping that, for instance, rather than giving Albanians the chance to own and manage what's left of the prime real estate appropriated by the Belgrade regime, the U.N. civilian administration is gobbling it up. Meanwhile, Shala complains that, by paying such high salaries for its many translators, the United Nations is luring away most of his journalists. "The U.N. is destroying us as independent media," he says. "They are weakening our already-weak institutions."

Disputes are also arising over the ethnic makeup of Kosovo's new bureaucracy. The United Nations remains nobly but anachronistically committed to the idea of getting Serbs and Albanians to live together, even as each group still harbors hopes of pushing the other out of power—or out of Kosovo altogether. In an effort to satisfy both communities, the U.N. civil administration has cooked up a scheme that strives to guarantee "full employment" for government employees. This program, which was tested in Pristina's municipal government offices earlier this month, calls for all Serbs employed at the time of the bombing and all Albanians who had *ever* been employed in the local government to return to work. Though the United Nations hopes that this is a temporary measure and that all state-run institutions and companies will be downsized someday, there is no telling when that could happen, and the autonomous Kosovar institutions look suspiciously destined to duplicate the bad habits of both their bloated U.N. parent and their bloated socialist predecessor. Furthermore, though the U.N. currently plans to pay all state employees until the state institutions become income-generating, as of yet the U.N. mission has not received the funds to cover even its own costs.

Already this feel-good scheme is beginning to make people feel bad. On the day the United Nations posted the first phase of employees to be welcomed back, I watched dozens of ethnic Albanians trot up the stairs of their former workplace only to find they had been excluded yet again. "I *haven't had a job for ten years,*" *screamed Sabit Gashit,* an ethnic Albanian who, upon realizing that his name had not yet been posted, very nearly attacked a group of Serbs waiting outside the building while their U.N. identity cards were processed. "They burned my house and massacred my family, and these people are going to work in this building and I'm not. I've waited for this day for so long—what kind of system is this?" City Hall would be shut down several days later when a mob of Albanians beat up a Serb coworker whom they accused of war crimes.

The "system" to which Gashit referred is, in effect, an affirmative action plan geared to protect Serb jobs in Kosovo. Without such an interventionist U.N. role, it is feared that all 100,000 of Kosovo's remaining Serbs will flee. Jay Carter, a senior U.N. official who has been installed as the de facto mayor of Pristina, describes his vision for assembling a local government that will initially be composed of 80 Albanians and 60 Serbs: "Rezhib shows up and says, 'I'm the boss.' Then Ivan shows up and says, 'I'm the boss.' Then we show up and say, 'No, we're the U.N. We're the boss.'" The trouble is that "Rezhib" has lived his entire life under foreign bosses, and he has just fought a bloody war to ensure that, once and for all, he would be his own master.

It is, of course, the KLA stalwarts who register the main objections to the robust U.N. vision. Bardhyl Mahmuti, a former political prisoner and an indispensable fund-raiser and gun-runner for the KLA, announced the formation of a new political party in early July and insists that the Kosovars are quite capable of governing themselves. He expects prompt elections and expresses shock at the U.N. affirmative action plan: "They cannot impose their will on us, just as we wouldn't go into Belgium to help them battle pedophilia," he says. "There are not two sides here. There is a side that destroyed everything and a side that lost everything."

Several days after arriving to assume the job of civil administrator, Bernard Kouchner of France urged Serbs and Albanians to look ahead. "Let's talk about the future, not about the past," he declared. But more than 95 percent of the population of Kosovo believes they will continue to breathe easily only if they ensure that the past from which they have just escaped will dictate the terms of any future arrangement. As Mahmuti stressed, "You can't democratize Kosovo if you ignore what happened in Kosovo."

The one thought that consoles KLA officials such as Mahmuti is also the thought that concerns those in foreign capitals. He believes that, however ambitious the U.N. plan, U.N. structural defects will doom its efforts to govern the province and will thus ensure Kosovar rule. "The United Nations has failed in many missions before," Mahmuti muses. "This won't be the first time." ■

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Al Gore's Gucci Gulcher.

Beltway Boy

By David Grann

When Al Gore needs companionship, he'll often leave his official residence on Massachusetts Avenue and head across the street—Secret Service detail in tow—to Tom Downey's house. The former New York congressman and lobbyist has become the Vernon Jordan of the Gore campaign: the proverbial player, the trusted confidant. He is always there behind the scenes, a sliver of a figure standing just beyond the camera's eye. While Clinton and Jordan confer on the golf course, Downey and Gore play basketball or shoot pool in the vice presidential mansion. "They are always sneaking off to each other's house," says one Gore aide.

Indeed, Downey's house, which is surrounded by elegant gardens and which, Downey once joked, "looks like one of my fund-raisers should be living in it," has become a hideaway for Gore—and an emblem of his deep-seated ties to the establishment. Several weeks ago, President Clinton and a cadre of the vice president's supporters showed up there to raise money for the Democratic National Committee, which will help fund Gore's candidacy if he wins the nomination. Hill Democrats and Gore officials drop by regularly for Downey's famous dinner parties, which have provided a steady supply of gossip for the society pages: it was Downey and his wife who introduced Gore's daughter Karenna to her husband; who threw an engagement party for House Budget Chairman John Kasich; and who, last week, entertained a guest list that included Cabinet Secretaries Bill Richardson, Andrew Cuomo, and Donna Shalala. "Downey has become Mr. Washington," says a Gore official. "He knows everyone and is connected to everyone."

As with Jordan, Downey's connections have brought him more than just friendship. According to *The Washington Post*, last year Downey's lobbying firm collected $1.8 million in fees from 47 clients, including several with business before his friends in Congress and the administration. Fuji, for instance, paid Downey $360,000 while fending off charges from the administration that it illegally blocked Eastman Kodak Co. from the Japanese market. Microsoft, still engaged in its antitrust suit, also paid Downey's company $280,000 over the past two years. "This town is called Connection Alley for a reason," says veteran lobbyist Tom Korologos, referring to Downey's sudden fortune.

There is, of course, nothing unusual (let alone illegal) about the rise of a Washington insider, about yet another legislator transforming himself into a lobbyist. Except that the figure at the center of this metamorphosis happens to be an erstwhile antiwar radical who always fought the system, who said he'd never consider himself "part of an establishment," and who, in his last congressional campaign in 1992, promised to "keep the revolution alive."

By age 25, Thomas J. Downey had built up a resume of mini-insurrections. At Cornell University in the 1960s, he demonstrated against the Vietnam War and White House. "I spent my time in college protesting," he once said. After graduating with a degree in labor relations, he defied both party machines and ran for the New York Suffolk County legislature. Only three years later, he burst onto the national scene as one of the youngest congressmen in history—a 25-year-old populist with a slightly cocky grin railing against Watergate, the campaign finance system, and the military. "He was always trying to ... reform things," says California Representative George Miller, another member of the rebellious congressional class of '74, which rode the anti-Nixon tide into power and altered American politics for a generation. Compared to the old guard, Miller adds, "Tom looked like a bomb thrower."

Indeed, in only his first few days in office, Downey joined in an unprecedented revolt to force committee chairmen to stand for election before the entire caucus, thus making them accountable to the party's rank and file; he even helped topple his own chairman on the Armed Services Committee, 73-year-old Louisianan Representative Edward Hebert. "[Downey] could be in your face," remembers former Connecticut Representative Toby Moffett, one of Downey's close friends, who also has since become a lobbyist. Before long, Downey's audacity had unleashed the furor of the old order. One member of his state delegation complained to the press: "Tom may be young, but he should be aware that political enemies usually last a lifetime."

At first, Downey was undaunted. He campaigned to open up committee meetings to the public and went toe-to-toe with Bob Dornan, who called him a "draft-dodging wimp." But, as time went on, there were subtle changes, what some considered "maturation" and others, like Charles Lewis of the Center for Public Integrity, saw as the first "cracks in the facade." Rather than trying to overturn the system, Downey increasingly channeled his energies within it; he lobbied for a seat on the powerful Ways and Means Committee and apprenticed under its baronial chairman, Dan Rostenkowski.

Downey's allies say this was the only way for him to pass any legislation, and, for many years, he struggled to balance his newfound powers with his longstanding goals. He shepherded major pieces of the liberal agenda through Congress, including increased funding for child care and Head Start. "I think he got as much out of Rostenkowski as Rostenkowski got out of him," says Democratic Representative Barney Frank of Massachusetts.

Yet, as Downey's power expanded, so did the "cracks." In 1985, subverting the very campaign finance reforms he had once championed, he and his colleagues on the Ways and Means Committee took advantage of a bill to overhaul the tax system that was pending before them to elicit campaign contributions from those potentially affected at unprecedented rates. During one $500-a-plate fund-raiser, then-Speaker

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Tip O'Neill looked out at the sea of lobbyists in the ballroom of the Hyatt Regency hotel and proclaimed: "[T]his is really marvelous. All this for just a little piece of legislation, which might or might not get to the floor." Asked about his own lavish fund-raisers, Downey exclaimed: "This is the golden age for lobbying."

IT WAS DURING this period that Downey cemented his relationship with Gore, who had been elected to the House in 1976. It was also during this period that Downey seemed to succumb fully to Washington's perks and charms. He moved his family from Long Island to a townhouse on Capitol Hill, where he and his wife regularly entertained the city's political gentry. By the time Gore ran for the presidency in 1988, Downey had become what he had always decried: the consummate insider. "I am in a position of enormous power in this House," he boasted to *Newsday*. "The majority leader and speaker are friends of mine. I can get things done. I am listened to. I have a lot more power than is generally understood on Long Island."

During Congress's Easter recess in 1990, Downey set out on a taxpayer-funded junket to Barbados with other members of the Ways and Means Committee. A handful of corporate lobbyists followed in their wake, including one from Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, which stood to gain from an insurance bill Downey was steering through Congress. As Downey and his friends drank and played football along the shore in a kind of caricature of the Washington influence game, two producers from ABC's "Prime Time Live" caught them on film. In one scene, a potbellied lobbyist with a cigar in his mouth pulled out a wad of cash and paid for Downey to use a jet ski. After the show aired, Downey apologized to his constituents and won reelection. But, two years later, he was caught again, this time in the House banking scandal: he had 151 overdrafts, while his wife had worked, according to employment records, as the bank's "auditor."

Downey tried to defend himself—to recapture his old populism. But his opponent in 1992 looked and sounded too much like the Downey the voters had elected 18 years before, while Downey himself looked and sounded too much like the man he had beaten back then. "There's something bigger than how powerful you are, how many powerful people you know, and whether you get invited to powerful cocktail parties," the 34-year-old GOP candidate, Rick Lazio, said.

On election night, as his life seemed to become a parable and his best friend won the vice presidency, Downey called Moffett in despair. The next day they met outside his deserted congressional office. "I'll never forget that solitary figure walking down the hallway.... He was a total basket case," says Moffett. Trying to cheer him up, Moffett invited Downey and several other defeated congressmen to his house, where they drank four bottles of wine and listened to Moffett regale them with stories of his life as a lobbyist. Soon after, Downey registered to become one. "I think a lot of people were surprised ... that he didn't become an activist—that he didn't carry his causes into the private sector," says one of his former staffers.

DOWNEY HIMSELF SEEMED a bit out of sorts at first, as if this were not what he was naturally meant to do. But he received a boost from friends, including Rostenkowski. Occasionally, when Downey was sitting in Morton's steak house with a new client, the Ways and Means Committee chairman would make a point of putting his arm around him and touting his influence. "That only has to happen once or twice and you're set," Downey told *The Washington Post* at the time.

It was not long before Downey had mastered the subtleties of the system. He landed one of his first contracts with none other than Metropolitan Life Insurance—the firm whose lobbyist had gone to Barbados with Downey and had contributed to his campaign as a congressman. He also frequently appeared on a weekly chat show produced by the Chamber of Commerce called "It's Your Business," which was shown on cable and to closed-circuit business subscribers. "He was only out there because of the constituents he was wooing," says Larry Sabato, a University of Virginia government professor who appeared on the show with him.

As Downey's clientele expanded to include Mobil, Time Warner, and Boeing, he retreated further and further from public view. Once gregarious with congressional reporters, he now rarely speaks to the press about his work. When *The Washington Post* called him recently for a profile on Gore advisers who double as lobbyists, Downey left a message on the reporter's machine saying, "I'm in Siberia on a dogsled." And when, after he had ignored my repeated phone messages asking for an interview, I dropped by his downtown offices, he still refused to meet with me. "He's booked from morning till night with clients," his secretary told me.

Yet, even as Downey has become "the perfect symbol" of what happens to people in Washington, as Lewis puts it, he has been careful not to hurt Gore's presidential aspirations. For example, Downey has been discreet compared to Peter Knight, Gore's former chief of staff. When Knight became a lobbyist, he was criticized widely for openly exploiting his contacts with Gore to lure business. The Republican House even briefly investigated whether he improperly used his connections to win Molten Metal Technology lucrative contracts with the Energy Department. (The charges fizzled.)

Friends say Downey still refuses to lobby against legislation he once supported, and, in contrast to Gore's new media consultant, Carter Eskew, he eschewed offers from tobacco companies. "He's not one of the slimeball lobbyists in this town," one of Downey's friends recently told the *National Journal*. Moffett told me Downey's real "passion is still children." Indeed, if Gore becomes president, Downey will likely face the same decision Vernon Jordan did in 1992: he can turn into one of the richest lobbyists in the country (as Jordan did) or become a full-time public servant for a relative pittance. It was once unimaginable that Tom Downey would ever face such a choice, let alone that the outcome would be in doubt. ■

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What to do with a $2.9 trillion surplus?

Spend It

By BARRY BLUESTONE

ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID SUTER

As it is usually framed, the question of what to do with the federal budget surplus is a straightforward contest between the rational and the irrational. On one side you have the tax-cutters—mostly Republican ideologues like Bill Archer and Dick Armey, whose primary interest is in giving tax breaks to affluent Americans while simultaneously shrinking a downsized government even further. On the other side you have the savers—sensible-sounding, mostly Democratic fiscal moderates like Leon Panetta and Lawrence Summers, who worry that such tax cuts might bring on deficits anew. They propose instead that we use surplus funds to chip away at the debt that the government has accumulated since World War II.

But there is a third alternative this caricature leaves out: spending a fair share of the budget surplus on public investment in research and development, infrastructure, and education and training. This idea doesn't get much of a hearing nowadays, but that doesn't mean it's wrong. Indeed, the reason nobody is talking seriously about such a program is that the consensus on why we even have a surplus—which is to say, the prevailing wisdom about why the economy is so strong—is filled with misconceptions. Unless we correct them, we may actually make future hardship more likely, not less.

Among most liberals—and quite a few conservatives—the shared narrative of our economic condition is all about the deficit, interest rates, and inflation. According to this theory, the economy was sluggish from the 1970s until the 1990s—except for a brief burst during the middle Reagan years—largely because inflation and then high interest rates discouraged spending by both consumers and businesses. And a principal factor in both conditions, the conventional wisdom tells us, is that the government was running such high deficits during this period. That's why, according to this story, the economy rebounded just as the government got deficits under control, winning back the confidence of Wall Street and persuading Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan to keep interest rates low in the mid- and late '90s.

But our newly buoyant economy may actually be due to a rebirth of productivity based on the coming of age of the information revolution—a process that was well under way

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before Bill Clinton and Newt Gingrich dueled over who could balance the federal budget faster and that would have produced faster growth today even if we had not targeted deficits so vigorously. After all, the causal relationship between falling deficits and faster growth usually runs from the latter to the former. That would explain why the deficits have suddenly fallen so much faster than official Washington (and most economists) ever thought possible and why the projected surpluses are so much larger than anyone believed possible just a few months ago.

Certainly, the economy's ups and downs since 1970 conform to established patterns for the appearance of a revolutionary technology. Historically, when such a technology has arrived on the scene, it has *reduced* productivity and growth, sometimes for decades, before the innovations begin to yield economic benefits. The initial producers of technology don't always get it right—and neither do the users. There is a great, but inevitable, amount of time and energy wasted trying to figure out how to efficiently harness a new technology.

This is precisely what happened with steam and electricity, and it is precisely what has been happening with computer technology. For decades, experts predicted that information technology would revolutionize business. But it is only in the past few years that the personal computer, local area networks, the Internet, and enormous advances in software have finally generated a productivity premium, as businesses fitfully work their way down the "learning curves" of these astounding new technologies and introduce the organizational structures to fully exploit them.

NOW, THE CONVENTIONAL wisdom doesn't deny that technology has improved productivity (although most economists have become believers in the productivity power of information technology only recently). It merely insists that, without lower deficits, the cost of recent investments in technology, and productivity improvements more generally, would never have happened because the cost of borrowing would have been too high for the private sector to absorb.

But, while the private sector plays an important role in investing, there's another source of investment that is surprisingly underappreciated these days: the federal government. The public sector has long played a crucial role in economic growth through investments in infrastructure, research and development, and human capital, all of which help foster new technology and train workers to be technically proficient. If the government had not invested enormous resources in radar and sonar during World War II, for example, we might have delayed improvements in communications and television by another decade or so. If we had not built thousands of miles of interstate highways beginning in the 1950s, the blossoming of the post-World War II auto industry would have been stunted.

More recently, it was the need for massive computing power to run modern defense systems that helped fund the design and construction of powerful mainframe computers. The requirement of miniaturized guidance systems for ICBMs and NASA rockets led the government to underwrite a good portion of the development costs of microprocessors and the software for programming them. It was the federal government's investment in the Arpanet that led to the modern-day Internet and the World Wide Web. Without these investments, today's ubiquitous e-commerce would never have emerged—or, at the very least, would have been delayed by perhaps decades. The latest theoretical breakthroughs in miniaturization, which could make future computers a hundred billion times faster than the fastest personal computer available today, have just been announced by the University of California at Los Angeles and Hewlett-Packard. This miraculous work is going on in university and private company labs, but almost all the funding has come from the Pentagon.

No wonder, then, that the United States is doing so well today in computers and information technology relative to even our most advanced trading partners. The massive investments the federal government made in these technologies have put American firms—from Intel and Microsoft to Sun, Dell, Apple, Hewlett-Packard, and Compaq—well ahead of the global pack. Similarly, medical research emanating from government-funded laboratories has provided us with a leg up in biotechnology, scanning devices, and a range of pharmaceuticals. These government research dollars have been, for the most part, phenomenally well spent, yielding social rates of return on the order of double the private rate of return. Moreover, when we increase spending on public-sector R&D, increases in private-sector R&D spending tend to follow within as little as a year. Thus a dollar shifted from reducing the federal debt to public investment yields a powerful growth premium. Essentially, we need to maintain a vital private-public partnership to ensure that all the ingredients for sustained technological innovation and economic growth are present.

HERE'S WHERE WE get to the bad news: the federal government has quietly been destroying vital elements of this partnership since the '70s. The long lag in technology's productivity premium can fool us into believing that there is little relationship between what we invest in the public sector and what we reap in return. Putting more resources into medical research today will not show up in reduced cancer rates until well into the next century. Pouring more dollars into public schools will not make second-graders any more productive in the economy until they enter the workforce ten or 15 years from now. But, if we do not make adequate provisions for such investments now, there will be no payoff in the future. The present growth spurt will fizzle.

One of the chief victims of the deficit-cutting and budget-balancing mania has been public spending on infrastructure and R&D. Since 1979, the share of federal investment in public nondefense infrastructure, education, and research has fallen steadily. In the '70s, when we were putting in place the investments in information technologies, infrastructure, and education that would eventually pay off in the '90s, federal investment in these activities averaged better than 2.5 percent of GDP. The percentage shrank dramatically during the '80s under the Reagan and Bush administrations and has continued to decline ever since. By 1998, it was down to only

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1.5 percent of GDP. To get back to the spending level of the '70s would cost more than $80 billion.

Unfortunately, under current projections, the federal government's investment role will continue to shrink. Total discretionary federal funding (excluding Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and interest on the federal debt) was 13.6 percent of GDP in 1968. Even as late as 1986, it amounted to ten percent of GDP. Twelve years later, it was down to 6.6 percent and is scheduled to fall to only 5.5 percent by 2004. Hence, by the middle of the next decade, the federal government's role in underwriting economic activity will have declined by more than half.

The private sector could hardly compensate for these losses—even if we used the surplus to cut taxes. The financial exigencies of the stock market force most firms to put the bulk of their resources into practical development work rather than basic research. Transportation infrastructure and large-scale water-treatment plants will not be constructed by private enterprise. Industry may invest in training for its own needs, but it will hesitate to invest anywhere near the resources necessary to boost the general skills of the workforce.

It makes sense, then, to devote at least some portion of the coming budget surpluses to public investment. Good candidates for increased R&D spending are medical research, biotechnology, and transportation technology—from high-speed rail to more fuel-efficient vehicles. We also need more public infrastructure investment aimed at rebuilding cities and addressing environmental hazards.

Building a labor force capable of implementing new technologies is just as important. We bemoan the fact that American students seem to be failing at higher rates than we would hope on basic math and language tests. But we have not invested sufficiently in children when they are very young. As early as kindergarten, many children have learning deficits that public schools cannot redress. Having the federal government underwrite one or even two years of pre-kindergarten school for all children would likely have a massive impact on both long-term growth and equity. The federal government has never been responsible for much K-12 spending—today it contributes seven percent, down from nearly ten percent in 1980. It could certainly afford more, including, perhaps, the upwards of $25 billion it would cost per year to reduce average class size to 20 students.

The federal government could also do more when it comes to bringing college within the reach of many more Americans. In 1997, only 23 percent of the workforce had at least a four-year college degree, while half had gone no further than high school. Part of the reason more adults do not pursue college educations is the extraordinary cost and the often punishing debt students face after leaving school. On average, public university students graduate $12,000 in debt, while private university students face more than $14,000 in loan repayments—and the number can go much higher. Of course, President Clinton has called for the hiring of 100,000 new teachers and for tax credits so that more Americans would have access to community college. Vice President Al Gore has led the movement to wire every classroom to the Internet. But, for every bright prospect such as these, there are far too many examples of the government turning its back on its responsibilities.

Would such a course bring on higher interest rates? Or might it compromise the goal of eliminating all federal debt, thus igniting a new round of inflation, which would push up interest rates, undermining private investment, and therefore do as much or more damage to the nation's growth potential as we would by ignoring public investment? In theory, it is possible to go overboard. But, in practice, the chances are surely remote. Low inflation has a lot more to do with higher productivity (from technology) and cheap imports than it does with the government's commitment to debt reduction. We can begin to step on the fiscal accelerator to fund federal investments with little fear of riling capital markets to the point where interest rates choke economic growth. As long as we can keep the productivity premium improving, the capital markets will take care of themselves. It's true the Republican Congress is unlikely to back such a plan. But that doesn't mean Democrats shouldn't at least be making the case for it. ■

Save It

By Alan S. Blinder

As huge federal budget surpluses rise phoenix-like from the ashes of massive deficits, our natural impulse is to spend more and enjoy big tax cuts. After all those years of nasty budgetary root-canal work—raising taxes and trimming programs—it sure is tempting to use our newfound riches to throw a party. But, as Richard Nixon once said, albeit in a different context, that would be wrong. The best use for most of the looming federal surpluses—not all, but most—is neither to cut taxes nor to finance higher spending but rather to save the surpluses, which means using them to pay down the national debt.

Before I defend this apparently Scrooge-like proposition, let me make two things clear. First, my position does not derive from any puritanical attachment to thrift. Second, I am not a purist. It is perfectly appropriate to use a bit of the lucre for some modest tax cuts. And there is certainly a case for some modest increases in public spending beyond the rigid limits ("caps") set in the 1997 budget agreement. But the key word here is "modest." Despite the seemingly flush

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state of the national Treasury, this is no time to go on another binge.

First, there's the "don't count your chickens" principle. To date, the overall budget surpluses are completely accounted for by Social Security. All the rest of the budget—the so-called on-budget part—is roughly balanced. The projections show an on-budget surplus developing soon and rising for the next decade and beyond. But those sunny projections are predicated on, among other things, adherence to the aforementioned spending caps. (Indeed, the projections also presume that the government will use the surpluses to pay down debt, thus keeping interest payments low, thus generating even more surplus.) Yet, in truth, the caps are too tight for the comfort of either Democrats or Republicans. They are bound to be breached, and no one knows by how much.

FURTHERMORE, THERE IS one thing we do know. Starting about a decade from now, waves of baby-boomers will begin retiring and making massive claims on the Social Security and Medicare systems—and they will continue to do so for many years. Under current law, the government's promise to pay benefits under these two social insurance programs exceeds likely payroll tax receipts—and that's without factoring in any drug benefits for Medicare. So those lovely Social Security surpluses are destined to turn into ugly deficits one day.

The consequences of this fact are still not widely understood. Even if we save every penny of the coming Social Security surpluses, as both the president and Congress have agreed to do, Social Security and Medicare are almost certain to require additional help to ensure their solvency in the long run. Unless we choose to balance the books entirely by cutting benefits, that will mean either raising the payroll tax or using some general revenue to shore up our two biggest social insurance programs. If general revenue is used for this purpose, as the president has proposed, that will use up some of the non-Social Security surplus—which is the source of the money for all those tax cuts you are hearing about. In a word, there is not quite as much loose change lying around as many people think.

The upshot is not that the long-run budget outlook is bleak. Far from it: The prognosis is excellent. But let's not get carried away and enact tax cuts that would eat up the entire on-budget surplus and more. If we cut income taxes excessively now, we are likely to find ourselves forced to raise payroll taxes later. Put differently, saving a good deal of the on-budget surpluses over the next decade would mitigate or obviate the need for future tax hikes. All the rhetoric you hear about "giving the money back to the people" ignores the likelihood that the people will be asked to pony up later—or else suffer deep cuts in their Social Security and Medicare benefits.

A second reason for favoring more saving has to do with the short run. Both tax cuts and higher government purchases stimulate the economy by boosting spending. But more spending is just about the last thing our economy needs right now. American consumers are doing very nicely on their own, thank you. In fact, total demand in the United States is surging ahead so rapidly that the Federal Reserve is worried that our economy may overheat. Such concerns induced the Fed to raise interest rates just a few weeks ago, and it may do so again.

SO HERE'S A pop quiz: What do you think the Fed would be likely to do if the government enacted a large tax cut? If you answered "raise interest rates even more," you get full credit. With our economy running flat out at present, cutting taxes is not very sensible macroeconomic policy. What the government gives in tax cuts, the Fed will take away with interest-rate hikes. And there's a catch: it's not an even trade. Cutting personal income taxes will give consumer spending a shot in the arm. But, if the Fed responds by raising interest rates, the components of total spending that are most sensitive to interest rates—especially business investment and home building—will suffer even more. So it's not simply a wash. In the end, we will have given up some factories, machinery, and new homes in return for more consumer goodies. This means less productive capacity in the future, which means slower growth. Does that sound like what America needs?

One of the secrets of our economy's marvelous performance in the '90s is that we have managed to engineer a combination of smaller budget deficits (which have led to today's surpluses) and easier monetary policy. That highly successful shift in the policy mix paved the way for lower interest rates and a truly remarkable surge of private investment. If we now reverse course by cutting taxes and tightening monetary policy, we run the risk of maiming the goose that laid all those golden eggs.

Does that mean that the government should never cut taxes? Or that it should never increase spending? Certainly not. The U.S. economy will not be this buoyant forever. Should it weaken and should unemployment rise, a large tax cut or dose of public spending could be called for. But not now.

Mentioning the truly impressive current spending habits of the American consumer brings me to a third reason for saving the surpluses: our country really needs more national saving. At last count, American consumers were spending more than $1.01 for every dollar of income they received. Yet American businesses are investing like mad, and they need borrowed funds to do so. From where are those funds coming? A portion has, of late, come from the federal budget surplus, which was almost one percent of the GDP in 1998. But most of the gap is being filled by foreigners parking huge sums of their money in the United States, often by purchasing Treasury bills and other secure financial instruments. That's very nice of them, but our debts to the rest of the world are piling up fast. Are we therefore heading for financial Armageddon? No. But these foreign lenders do expect to be paid back—with interest. In other words, accumulating foreign debt means incurring liabilities that future Americans must cover. And isn't it a bit unseemly for the world's economic superpower to hog the international financial trough?

There are only three ways to reduce our dependence on

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foreign borrowing. American consumers could save more, which they seem profoundly disinclined to do as long as the stock market is soaring and new credit card offers arrive with each day's mail. Or the government could save more by running even larger budget surpluses, which is just the policy I am advocating. Or—the worst choice of all—American businesses could curtail their investment spending, leaving us with a more slowly growing, less productive economy. Which do you prefer? A vote for large tax cuts is, at the margin, a vote for either more foreign borrowing or less investment.

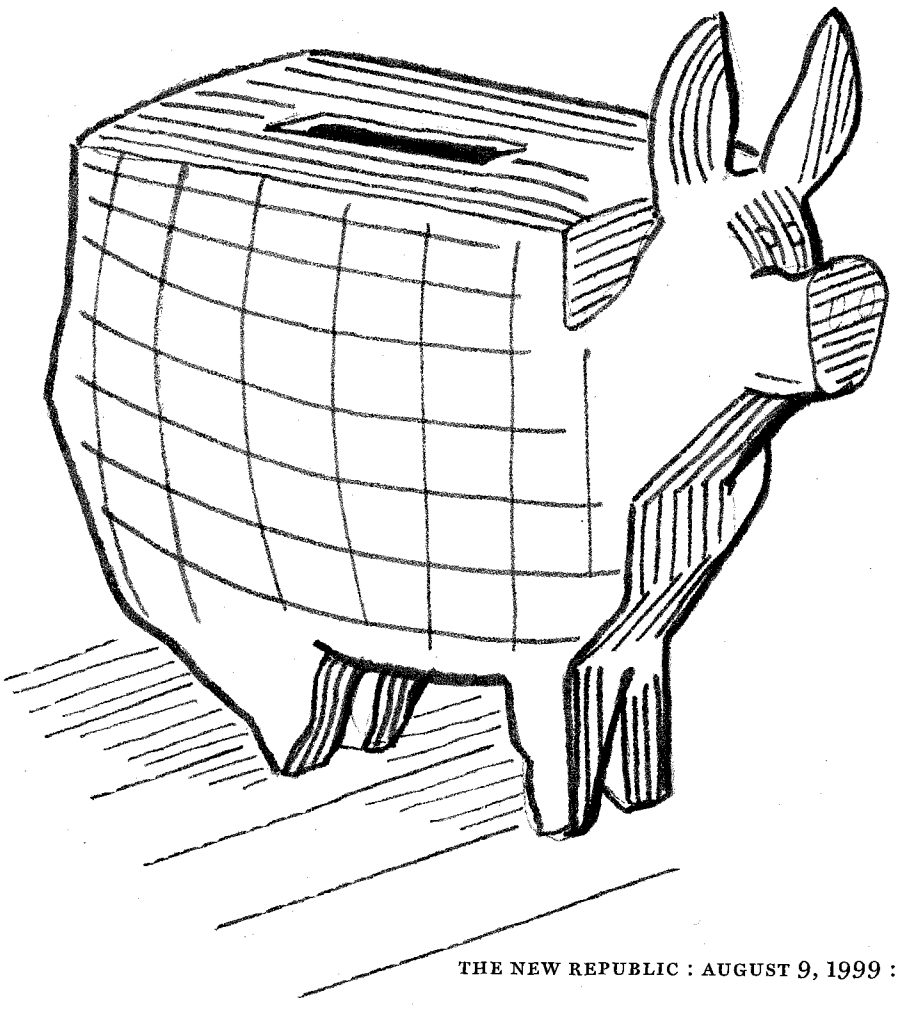
FINALLY, IT'S IMPOSSIBLE to debate the merits of alternative uses of the surplus without considering the distributional consequences of some of the current tax-cutting proposals. The House bill, for example, features such items as an "across the board" cut in income tax rates, yet another reduction in the capital gains tax, and a reduction or elimination of the estate tax. Do you see a pattern there? If you don't, your accountant does. The deck is clearly stacked to give tax relief where it is needed least: to the most affluent Americans, just the people who are already better off financially than they have been at any time in recent memory.

Proponents of these cuts have gone to great lengths to sell them as "middle class" tax cuts. While cuts in the capital gains and estate taxes clearly fail the test (nearly all of the benefits would go to the top one percent of the income scale), the income tax reductions might appear to qualify as tax relief for the average citizen. After all, an "across the board" rate cut sounds pretty neutral. But remember this: the personal income tax is the chief source of progressivity in the entire federal revenue system. In 1996, for example, the richest five percent of taxpayers paid nearly 51 percent of all the personal income tax receipts—because they were making so much money in the first place. It follows that these wealthy citizens have much more to gain from "across the board" reductions than the middle class—not to mention those too poor to pay any income tax at all, who will gain nothing.

Regressivity does not inhere in the idea of cutting taxes, however. A more progressive tax cut might feature, for example, a more generous earned income tax credit. Or the standard deduction or personal exemption could be raised. Or the lowest-bracket rate could be cut, as Senator William Roth of Delaware has proposed. Or low- and moderate-income families could be given saving incentives, as the president has proposed. Any of these tax cuts would encounter the same macroeconomic objection raised earlier—the economy does not need a stimulus—but at least they would confer benefits on a needier population.

HAVING SAID ALL this, we need not and should not turn surplus worship into a fetish. I see no particular virtue—but some potential problems—in driving the national debt all the way to zero, which would happen within 15 years, according to some projections. (For example, the abolition of the U.S. national debt would shut down the world's most liquid capital market—the market for American Treasury securities—and the Fed would need to come up with new ways to conduct monetary policy.) The anticipated inflows of cash to the Treasury, if they materialize, will certainly leave room for some tax cuts down the line. And, as mentioned earlier, the spending caps set in 1997 are unrealistic on their face—and become ludicrous when extrapolated far into the future. Spending above the caps is not only certain but also appropriate. After all, some potential uses of public funds are more important than adding another dollar to national saving. Education and public infrastructure come to mind—both build for the future.

But caution is in order. Some of us are old enough to remember the fateful year of 1981, when Congress got carried away in an orgy of tax-cutting that left us a fiscal problem lasting 15 years. We don't need to go down that road again. Instead, by managing our fiscal affairs prudently, we can "have it all." We can, eventually, spend more than the caps, enjoy some modest tax cuts, and do a lot more national saving. ■



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Give It Back

By AMITY SHLAES

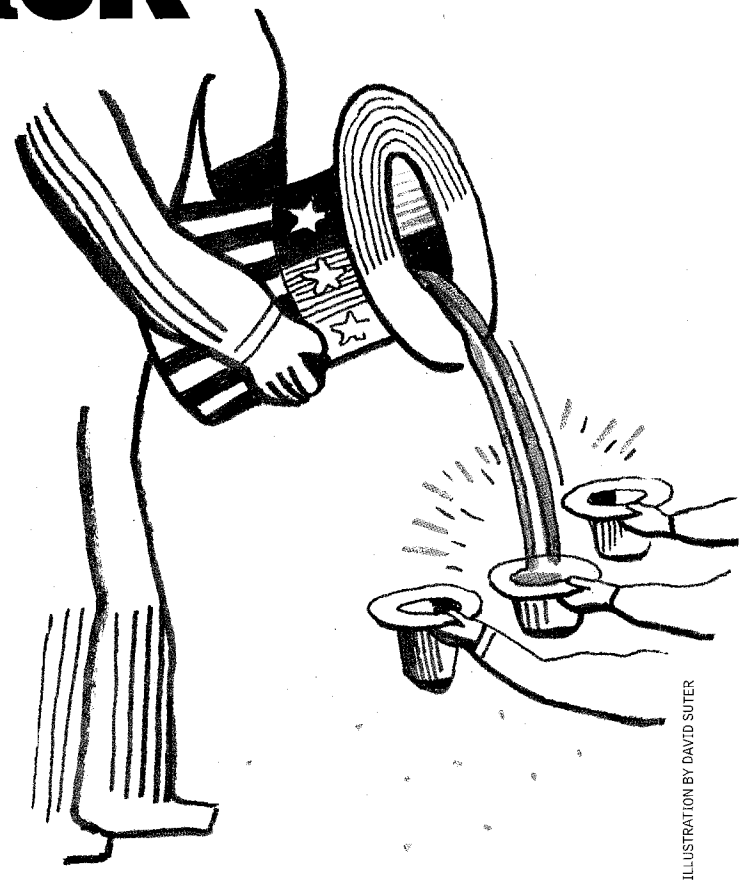

ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID SUTER

ONE SURE SIGN that Republican tax cutters are struggling without Ronald Reagan is the fact that they quote him so much. Thus presidential candidate John McCain: "I ask every Republican voter to let my colleagues know that you still believe in the cause Ronald Reagan fought for." And thus Grover Norquist of Americans for Tax Reform: "[Reagan's] economic policies of tax cuts, deregulation, and choice for the American taxpayer are largely responsible for the economic good times we are enjoying today."

True enough. But Norquist's encomium also reveals a problem for the GOP. The whole basis for the tax rebellions of the late '70s and early '80s was *bad* times—indeed, astoundingly bad times. In those days, inflation, high taxes, and global uncertainty combined to put the nation in something close to emergency mode. As Reagan said in his first inaugural address, in 1981, "Our objective must be a healthy, vigorous, growing economy." The dramatic tax cuts that he brought about were a remedy for the period's unique malaise. While the supply-siders vilified John Maynard Keynes, in this instance they joined the Keynesians in arguing that fiscal stimulus could jump-start a stalled economy. Today, by contrast, the economy hardly needs jump-starting. Growth is back to its old powerhouse levels; there seems to be nothing but blue sky ahead on the inflation front. And, without the old urgency, the GOP tax cutters have trouble marshaling sufficient energy to power through their cuts.

But, while fiscal stimulus no longer seems as urgent, there are good reasons for monumental tax cuts. When Republicans stand up for broad and serious tax cuts, they are also standing up for an old American ideal: faith in the individual. Their efforts, though sometimes faltering, represent a crucial campaign to give the country a tax code commensurate with the current temper of our society. A more appropriate code, in turn, will do much to sustain us on the new path we have chosen.

Consider first, that new path: today we place our faith in individuals and the private sector more than at any time in recent memory—and we are right to do so. We have come to understand that a globalized, technologically driven economy, left to its own devices, will provide for the poor better than welfare ever could. We eye the powerful earnings potential of the stock market and realize that it can provide for better, more reliable retirements than the pay-as-you-go Social Security net. The present administration's boasts notwithstanding, the very existence of our surprise surplus is proof that it is a dynamic market, not good government, that produces prosperity. The fact that the microchip thrived here and not in Europe (or, as many once predicted, in Japan) is an argument for smaller government. For, even after the tax hikes of the 1990s, the United States has retained a freer (and less taxed) economy than the other great powers.

All in all, America in 1999 is a different country from the nation we knew even, say, 25 years ago. There is a new sentiment that government ought to retreat. *Blueprint*, the magazine of the Progressive Policy Institute (PPI) and a vehicle for New Democratic thinking, recently republished a 1973 Harris poll asking people to describe their views of government. The poll posed the question, "Do you agree, or disagree: the best government is the government that governs the least?" In 1973, 56 percent of Americans disagreed with the proposition—that is, they felt the need for big government. But, when the PPI asked the same question of voters in 1998, it got the opposite result. This time, 56 percent of Americans agreed. More tellingly, fewer than two in ten Americans—even fewer than two in ten Democrats—believed that it was the job of government to redistribute wealth.

And yet we still find ourselves with a tax regime built for big government, a massive engine of redistribution more

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worthy of Mitterrand's France than the land of the home-office millionaire. Today, the federal tax take represents 20.7 percent of gross domestic product, the highest level it has been in any year except during World War II. A disproportionate share of the new revenue comes from taxes paid by higher earners—taxes on wages and capital gains. In other words, at a time when people are less supportive of redistribution than at any other time in recent memory, the tax code is also more heavily redistributive.

In recent weeks, Representative Bill Archer, the Republican chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, has come under attack from the left for advocating an across-the-board tax cut—a tax cut that would include bringing down the top marginal income tax rate for the very highest earners. Democrats generally present this as an affront, and yet it would bring relief for the very people who have created our current prosperity. The reason to give the cash to them is a very simple one: it's *their* money. Anyone who believes that money can be "saved" and returned "later on" through government programs ignores the political history of the New Deal and the Great Society—and the sad legacies of waste, ineptitude, and fraud they've left us today.

THE SECOND ARGUMENT for broad tax cuts is simply an argument against the intrusion of taxes. Americans are weary of interacting with the tax beast: last year's furious passage of an IRS reform law—the Senate vote was 97–0—is clear evidence of this. But the source of citizens' fury was not really the IRS, for all its wrongdoings. The demon behind the IRS demon is the code itself. Welfare and other entitlements, as we've noted, are out of favor in the '90s. Lawmakers, Republicans included, have taken all the energy they used to pour into writing entitlements and applied it to the tax code. This exercise in social engineering has produced a maddeningly complex tax system—one that penalizes those who cannot afford to hire their own accountants, which is to say the people the progressive tax code is supposed to succor.

Consider the status of very low earners, a group whom both parties claim to have done so much to protect. In this decade, we have expanded the Earned Income Tax Credit, a cash rebate, to help these people and encourage them to stay in the workforce. But the credit phases out and, in doing so, creates some perverse results. A Congressional Budget Office study shows that, in tax year 1996, two people earning $11,000 each would lose as much as $3,701 in earned income tax cash rebates if they decided to marry—an enormous amount for a household of $22,000. This means precisely what it sounds like: had the pair stayed single, they would have found themselves with $3,701 more to spend.

At the middle income level, other demons emerge. The Alternative Minimum Tax, a vehicle written into law to close loopholes for wealthy taxpayers, now punishes hundreds of thousands of families earning less than $80,000. Within ten years, it will hit nine million.

And, at the top, the hit is just as hard. In 1997, lawmakers lowered the capital gains tax. In the rarefied halls of economic theory, this move makes sense, for capital is already taxed once at the corporate level. But the reality of the capital gains cut—and another is forthcoming—is that it creates a fresh social division, what we at *The Wall Street Journal* have called the division between the haves and the almost-haves. On the one hand are the haves, who pay taxes on capital gains at 20 percent or, in some states, 30 percent. On the other hand are the wage slaves, whose entire incomes are subject to heavier income tax levies. Their money is taxed at 40 percent or, in the higher-tax states, 50 percent. This means that the government is depriving these people—professionals, mostly—of the chance to ensure prosperity for their children.

The most important group for the country, after all, is not the wealthy, although we may legitimately wish them well. It is those who hope to become wealthy—a hallowed definition of what it means to be an American. These people look up the progressivity ladder and see only greater punishment awaiting them. The obstacles they face—a top federal tax rate of 40 percent, plus state and local taxes that can put them over the 50 percent line—are higher than the hurdles that confronted their older siblings, who had only Ronald Reagan's 28 percent bracket to surmount.

A FINAL ARGUMENT for tax-cutting lies in our vision for the future. For, while we may no longer argue the need to "stimulate" the economy, our new individualism tells us that an economy free of the burden of the current code could only do better. And, yes, such growth is likely to have a trickle-down effect in city jobs, in prosperity. Here, the supply-siders' theories are anything but outdated.

The most immediate penalties for inaction, though, lie in the political sphere. Tax disillusionment is a big part of voter disillusionment. It shows up in declining voter-turnout rates, in the fact that fewer people check the "presidential election campaign" box on their 1040s, and in polls that show declining faith in government. Voters have learned that government often promises serious tax relief, but rarely delivers it.

In this sense, the reigning economic philosopher of our era is not Milton Friedman, the free-market hero whose thinking so inspired the '80s warriors. It is another Nobelist, James Buchanan of George Mason University. Leading a school of thought known as public choice theory, Buchanan has argued that the government's impulse is very much like the impulse of any private-sector business—it wants to compete and grow. This is why, in 1999, bereft of any serious reason to maintain high taxes—we have, after all, no war, no deficit, and a president who has declared the era of big government to be over—many lawmakers, particularly Democrats, still insist on spending first and cutting later.

It is a bitter betrayal and one that tells us that tax cuts—broad cuts, cuts that also benefit "the rich"—can do more than any other policy to restore faith in the social contract. Freedom is necessary to sustain our civil society, as well as the prosperous era we have begun. A great president once said: "Only when the human spirit is allowed to invent and create, only when individuals are given a personal stake in deciding economic policies and benefiting from their success—only then can societies remain economically alive, dynamic." That was Ronald Reagan, whose broader message can still guide us, after all. ■

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

A Daughter, A Father

In Georges Bernanos's novel *The Diary of a Country Priest*, an older priest advises the title character about the spectrum of souls that they both confront. The best and the worst are certain to be dealt with, he says; it is the mediocrities that are difficult to engage. "Mediocrities are a trap set by the devil." Transposing this remark to the secular, any critic of an art will see its truth. In film that truth is especially painful—especially diabolical—because the mediocre is often a hard-won exception to the general rule of poor stuff.

Rosie (New Yorker) is such a case, assuredly far above the general run yet ultimately mediocre. In fact, the film takes a while to struggle down to mediocrity: it begins with promise of much more. Set in Flemish Belgium in 1980, in a bleak section of Antwerp, it follows a thirteen-year-old girl who, at the start, is being admitted to a girls' prison. The laconic, quasi-documentary style, pinned in place by the exceptional quality of Aranka Coppens as Rosie; the strategy of devoting the film to the matters that led up to its start; the sharp breath of misery-laden air—these brace us for extension of experience of several kinds. But soon we see that *Rosie* is an insufficient burst of truth. The opening tremors take it only far enough to enroll it among the dozens of honest films about the lives of oppressed children globally, in every part of the U.S., in Brazil, Japan, France, Germany, Italy. Obviously, wherever there are children, there is abuse of one kind or another, but some of the films that deal with it do more than report it. (Gianni Amelio's *Stolen Children*, for prime instance.) *Rosie*, at the last, does little more than add another locale.

Yet Bernanos's dictum must be remembered. *Rosie* is not nothing. Written and directed by Patrice Toye—her first feature—it concerns an early adolescent who lives in a crowded flat in one more of those international scabs called housing projects. Her (single) mother, Irene, who works as an X-ray technician, insists that Rosie call her sister, not mummy, because Irene had her when she herself was only fourteen and doesn't want to seem old in the eyes of male friends. One such friend is Bernard, who becomes seriously interested in Irene; but although he sometimes spends the night with her, their affair is impeded by Michel, Irene's layabout brother, now staying in the apartment.

In the midst of this mess, Rosie's hunger for a mother works out in her own "mothering": she kidnaps a baby for a day or so. With a boyfriend of sixteen, she pretends for that brief time to have a family. Because of the kidnapping and more, her tensions with her uncle lead to a revelation, not quite surprising, that connects with her arrival in the prison where the story began.

But all these incidents, with others, are less like insights than answers to a social worker's questionnaire. Toye is clearly angry and anguished about Rosie's situation, but she has found only fairly facile tropes through which to express her feelings. Compare another film set in Belgium—in Walloon Belgium—*La Promesse* (1997), which dealt with a troubled adolescent boy. The Dardennes brothers, who made that film, found ways to enhance their moral drama, to take it far past recital of data. Toye has been content to cobble together some familiar actions, even one familiar twist, and has relied on her sincerity to lift the film. It does, but only to mediocrity. So (as per Bernanos) *Rosie* is to be neither ignored nor exalted.

Belatedly, a welcome to **My Son the Fanatic** (Miramax). It was written by Hanif Kureishi, author of *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, and was directed by Udayan Prasad, Indian-born but raised in England, whose second feature it is. I've not seen his first, *Brothers in Trouble*, but Om Puri, who was in it, plays the leading role in the new picture.

Here Puri is Parvez, Pakistani-born, who has spent twenty-five years as a taxi driver in the northern English city of Bradford. The story opens with a party to toast the engagement of Parvez's son Farid and the daughter of a very English police inspector. Parvez is delighted; the inspector is not. The engagement doesn't last, and Farid makes his way, mostly off-screen, from this attempt at assimilation to fierce Islamic fundamentalism. This journey takes place so consistently off-screen that the film's title is a misnomer. Farid does become a fanatic, in his father's eyes, but it is a secondary matter: his father is the protagonist of the story.

An important part of Parvez's business is hooker transport. He carries hookers to and from their dates, he makes hooker recommendations to visiting businessmen, and, apparently like other drivers, considers all this to be simply part of his job. He becomes friendly with the women, especially with Bettina (played by Rachel Griffiths, the Hilary of *Hilary and Jackie*). She gets to know something of Parvez's open spirit and concern for his son. In time she falls in love with Parvez, as he does with her. Their affair becomes more than another fictional sob about a hooker's one true love because of the generosity in both performances. Underlying their happiness in each other is fear—about the future—plus the sense that each has earned this love and must have it while it is possible. The affair becomes known to both Parvez's wife and son, and of course affects them. The story ends with determination more than resolution.

The film plumbs some depths in societal relations (including a few sharp anti-Jewish cracks by Pakistanis), but it centers on Parvez, on interior turbulence in him. A quarter-century ago he uprooted himself for the sake of his family, and now more uprootings loom. Puri, highly esteemed in Indian film and theater, has immediate unforced power, warmth, and the gift of evoking sympathy without asking for it. Bettina's response to Parvez is thus all the more understandable—and dangerous. Griffiths gives us both the heat and the despair. Also present is Stellan Skarsgard, the Swedish actor who has rocketed into English-language films (*Breaking the Waves*, *Good Will Hunting*, etc.). Here he is a German business visitor, but, whatever he is, continues to mystify me. How does a director distinguish between Skarsgard and the grips and electricians on the set? ■

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Martin Filler on Architecture

The Interventionist

CARLO SCARPA WAS the greatest Venetian architect since Palladio, and he remains the greatest architect of this century still unknown to the general public. The proof is abundantly apparent in the splendid exhibition at the Canadian Center for Architecture in Montreal through the end of October. It is shocking that **Carlo Scarpa Architect: Intervening with History** is his first North American retrospective, but it is not surprising. Rarely has modern architecture this powerful been also so poetic, and so cryptic. Scarpa's work is particularly hard for the layman to comprehend at a remove from the buildings themselves. In this respect, his constructions are the very opposite of the work of his early idol, the rather accessible Frank Lloyd Wright.

When Scarpa died in 1978 at the age of seventy-two, he left one of the most remarkable bodies of work of any twentieth-century architect, and it was no less important for being quite small and including very few buildings that were free-standing or of any appreciable size. Two decades later, however, his relevance to contemporary architecture seems stronger than ever. Scarpa anticipated problems that have become widespread, and his solutions to those problems remain unsurpassed. Though Scarpa has been a cult figure in his profession for so long that by now he is surrounded with the aura of an Old Master, it is instructive to recall that he was born in the same year as that inveterate self-reinventor, Philip Johnson.

Scarpa was much influenced by Wright's theory of organic architecture, which proposed that all elements of a scheme be conceived as inseparable parts of a unified whole. But the CCA show strongly suggests Scarpa's equally close affinities with his near-contemporary Louis Kahn. Both Kahn and Scarpa were late bloomers whose professional development was long delayed by the Great Depression and World War II; and both became transfixed by history, and were transformed by it, in middle age, during the postwar years when architecture was at its most amnesiac.

By 1950, those two introspective and artistically ambitious men had become repelled by the physical thinness, the spiritual emptiness, and the global sameness of International Style architecture in its later corporate phase. To redress the loss of soul and substance in modern building, they looked back at the architecture of the past, not in an attempt to imitate or to revive it, but instead to extract its essence and to re-interpret it for their own time in new and pertinent ways.

"I have always had an immense desire to belong to tradition," Scarpa once said, "but without having capitals and columns." Scarpa simply refused to be obvious. This accounts, in large part, for the difficulty that many people experience in attempting to penetrate his architectural thought. He would not use history as a grab-bag of styling tricks, and he would have been sickened by the ignorant and heavy-handed invocation of the past by the postmodern movement in architecture, which was just getting underway at the time of his death.

In 1951, Scarpa demonstrated how a contemporary architect could eloquently summon up the grandeur of the ancients by using primal geometry expressed in the reductivist vocabulary of the moderns. His Veritti Tomb at the Cemetery of San Vito in Udine (designed with Angelo Masieri) is a veritable cube made of thin slabs of stone, with a huge round aperture cut into the center of the facade. A Wrightian bronze entry gate screens the lower third of the circle, with a hemispherical Prairie School-style planter set asymmetrically to one side. Scarpa emphasizes the inner void of the cube—the burial place itself—by piercing the side and back walls with smaller geometric openings. The roof of the mausoleum is a disc as large as the front opening, suspended above the graves and held free from the ceiling's vacant corners. This negative-positive form is underscored by the perception that the overhead circle was removed from the facade. Without resorting to any specific historical devices, Scarpa imbues the Veritti Tomb with a forceful presence equal to that of the noblest classical architecture.

Scarpa's use of one geometrical shape cut into the three-dimensional volume of another geometrical shape would eventually become a favorite motif of Kahn's, as in the West Hostels of the Sher-e-Bangla Nagar capitol complex of 1962-83 in Dhaka, Bangladesh, with their vast circular apertures puncturing the outer walls of cubic pavilions, or the interior of the Phillips Exeter Academy Library of 1965-72 in Exeter, New Hampshire, with its colossal concrete oculi framing each of the four elevations of the cyclopean central hall. Kahn also offered his own geometric variations on the circle-in-a-cube theme set forth by Scarpa, as in the triangular openings on the cylindrical towers of his National Assembly Building of 1962-83 in Dhaka.

DESPITE THE HEROIC project that Scarpa and Kahn shared, and despite its vast implications for the public realm, both men are now widely regarded as architects' architects, as self-absorbed designers whose co-professionals are those most likely to empathize with their uningratiating forms, unrelenting geometries, and obsessive focus on details. It is certainly true that Scarpa lavished intense attention and great invention on what the general public might consider the little things of architecture—door handles and hinges, wall surfaces, paving textures, stair balustrades, and the like; but he was no solipsist. He understood that it is precisely on that level of material intimacy that most people experience a building, rather than through the grand and sometimes arcane conceptions that are seldom evident to non-specialists.

For his reworking, in 1961-63, of the ground floor and courtyard of the Palazzo Querini Stampalia in Venice, a sixteenth-century landmark that now houses a research library and art collection, Scarpa took infinite pains in designing a new footbridge leading across a narrow canal to the building's entrance. His many sheets of densely reworked preparatory sketches—"I can see an image only if I draw it," he said—illustrate the patience and the care that he invested in an element of a project that most other architects of the time would have breezed through by adopting a more straightforward technological solution. Scarpa never took the easy way.

The pleasingly gentle arc of the bridge's steel double span, the resilient feel of the perfectly proportioned wooden treads that Scarpa affixed atop it, and especially the wood-and-brass handrail that is startlingly sensuous to the touch, give a tactile

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preview of his work inside the building. And the appropriate local materials were always central to Scarpa's thinking as well. For an entrance plaque inscribed with the name of the Querini Stampalia Foundation, he specified Istrian stone, the Adriatic limestone long used throughout Venice because its surface builds up a protective patina against the corrosive salt air of the lagoon.

No commission was too mundane for Scarpa to treat with the utmost seriousness. In a world in which museums now seem like shopping malls, it is sobering to look back on a time not so long ago when he could make a shop seem like a museum. His Olivetti showroom of 1957-58 on St. Mark's Square in Venice was a natural extension of the business-machine firm's identification with high-style design. Occupying two bays of a retail arcade opening onto "the living room of Europe," this small but imposing display environment possessed a very Venetian mixture of dignity and theatricality. As George Ranalli writes in one of his thoughtful commentaries in the exhibition catalog:

> Without either sacrificing his creativity or holding back on his architectural agenda, Scarpa developed a way of connecting an avant-garde design to the sensibility of the work that for centuries had been produced in this quarter. One of his strategies was to use the same artisanal techniques of construction that had formed the historic city in order to evolve new forms.

COURTESY CANADIAN CENTER FOR ARCHITECTURE

Cangrande Statue, Castelvecchio Museum, Verona, 1956–73

The Olivetti showroom's shimmering floor of pale gold and deep red Murano glass mosaic irregularly set in cement seemed to draw visitors inward like a flood tide (a not-unintentional metaphor for the *acqua alta* that immerses the city periodically) and suffused the rooms with a warm reflected glow. Smooth, natural-colored stucco walls were outlined with simple strips of dark-stained wood, near rough concrete walls inset with narrow bands of brass. The company's products were discreetly but effectively displayed on low tables or pedestals designed by the architect, making the merchandise seem like congenial analogs to the setting rather than objects of worship. In one corner, a low, rectangular marble fountain was incised with geometric motifs, simultaneously recalling traditional Japanese design and an Islamic water garden in miniature. In another corner of the ground floor, a majestic stairway of invisibly supported marble slabs rose weightlessly to offices on the mezzanine level. In all, this was one of the most extraordinary interiors of any epoch in Venice. It was a great seductive advertisement for quality, Olivetti's and Scarpa's, until the company moved out a few years ago and egregiously turned this treasure over to an unsympathetic tenant.

It is regrettable that the Scarpa show will not be seen elsewhere in the Americas, though this is demanding material for the museumgoing public. It is highly improbable that the architect's hermetic (though ravishing) drawings, which make up the bulk of the exhibition, will ever be understood by many beyond architectural initiates. The magnificent new photographs that were commissioned for the show from Guido Guidi—who took several years to complete the project, sometimes waiting seasons to capture a certain work in an optimum effect of natural light—are unlikely ever to be superseded. Again, it is doubtful that their delicate tonalities and numinous nuances can be appreciated by a mass audience visually inured to such subtleties by the retinal overload of today's electronic media.

But this melancholy thought is not the fault of the present show. It has been organized with exemplary clarity and understanding by its guest curator, Mildred Friedman, whose exhibitions during her tenure as architecture curator at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis from 1970 to 1991 were correctly regarded as the period's finest American museum presentations on the building art. The evocative installation, by the American architect George Ranalli, who counts himself a disciple of Scarpa, is a paragon of exhibition design that further illuminates the subject. Ranalli's pedestal display bases—with their plates of raw welded steel, burnished, lacquered, and inset with contrasting brass screws—pay homage to Scarpa's love of elemental materials, artisanal craftsmanship, and unexpected details, confirmed by the nearby positioning of several of the wooden easels designed by the master himself. The superb catalog is a major addition to Scarpa's scant bibliography in English, and it is certain to become a basic reference. But Scarpa will never be a candidate for the architectural mainstream, and much of his distinction lies in the fact that his work reveals itself only with the same deliberate contemplation that he devoted to its creation.

The weight of the past bore heavily on Scarpa, who was born in Venice—a city profuse in architectural splendor but virtually devoid of opportunities for new construction beyond the preservation of the old—and was raised there and in the nearby regional capital of Vicenza, with its wealth of civic landmarks by Palladio. His first major project, the internal restructuring of the Gothic Ca' Foscari on the Grand Canal for the University of Venice in 1935–37, early on showed his sure hand in inserting strong but sympathetic modern elements into a historical framework. Returning to such traditional Venetian materials as terrazzo and scagliola, he employed skilled artisans to install them using age-old techniques but in distinctly modern configurations. In this way, he endowed the interiors with a formal purity that enhanced their low-key richness, much like the early work of Mies van der Rohe, whom the young Scarpa particularly esteemed.

Yet such projects were rare, and like most other Italian architects (then and now) Scarpa was forced to find alterna-

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Arabian Fables (II)

More fanciful Arab myths to sway world opinion.

Earlier this year, we published our message, "Arabian Fables (I)", in which we made clear how the Arab propaganda machine creates myths and lies with which to misinform the world. We discussed the myths of the "Palestinians" and of the "West Bank" and the mythical concept of "occupied territories". In today's message, we shall address three more of these myths.

What are some of these myths?

Jerusalem ("Arab East Jerusalem"). The Arabs have assiduously propagated the myths that Jerusalem is an Arab capital, that (after Mecca and Medina) Jerusalem is their third holy city, and that it is intolerable to them that infidels (Jews) are in possession of it.

The reality of course is that Jerusalem was never an Arab capital and that it was, until the Jews revitalized it, a dusty provincial city that hardly played any economic, social, or political role. Jerusalem is mentioned hundreds of times in the Jewish Bible and has been the center of the Jewish faith and the focus of Jewish longing ever since the Romans destroyed the Temple in the early years of the first millenium. Not once is Jerusalem mentioned in the Koran.

> "The Arab propaganda machine has created myths that have been accepted by much of the world. No peace in the Middle East is possible until those Arab myths have been exposed for what they are!"

As to "East Jerusalem": There is East Saint Louis, there is East Hampton, and there used to be East Berlin, but, until the Arab propaganda machine created the concept, there was never in history an "East Jerusalem", let alone an "Arab East Jerusalem".

The eastern part of Jerusalem is now predominantly inhabited by Arabs, though their proportion is decreasing. But what is the reason for this? It is because the Jordanians destroyed all traces of Jewish presence from the eastern part of the city and drove all the Jews out during the 19 years (between 1948 and 1967) in which they were in occupation of the eastern part of the city. The world, informed by Arab propaganda, considers those Jews who wish to return to the eastern part of the city to be troublemakers or worse.

The concept of Jerusalem being a holy Arab city and the capital of whatever political entity the "Palestinians" may eventually form is a myth and so of course is the concept of "Arab East Jerusalem".

"Settlements". When Jordan came into possession of Judea/Samaria and the eastern part of Jerusalem, following the invasion of the newly-formed Jewish state, and stayed in occupation for 19 years, it systematically obliterated all Jewish villages in the area under their occupation, drove out the Jewish inhabitants, and left the area "judenrein" (free of Jews) – the first time that concept had been applied since the Nazis created it during their short and bloody reign in Germany. When the Israelis recovered these territories, they rebuilt these villages, created new ones, and built new towns and suburbs to existing cities, especially Jerusalem.

The Arabs decided to call these towns and villages "settlements", with their connotation of illegitimacy and impermanence. The world, including the United States, is much agitated over these population centers and, goaded by the Arabs, declares them to be impediments to peace. What nonsense! Nobody considers the tens of thousands of Arabs who continue to stream to these territories as impediments to peace.

The term "settlements", too, is a propaganda myth created by the Arabs.

"Refugees". In 1948, when six Arab armies invaded the Jewish state in order to destroy it on the very day of its birth, broadcasts by the advancing Arab armies appealed to the resident Arabs to leave their homes so as not to be in the way of the invaders. As soon as the "quick victory" was won, they could return to their homes and would also enjoy the loot from the Jews, who would have been driven into the sea. It didn't turn out quite that way. Those Arabs who, despite the urgings of the Jews to stay and to remain calm, foolishly left, became refugees. Those who decided not to yield to those blandishments are now, and have been for over 50 years, citizens of Israel, with all the same rights and privileges as their Jewish fellows.

But what happened to those refugees – by best estimates about 600,000 of them? Did their "Arab brethren" allow them to settle in their countries, to work, and to become productive citizens and useful members of their societies? No! They kept and still keep them, their children, their grandchildren, and in some cases even their great-grandchildren, in miserable "refugee camps", so that they can be used as political and military pawns in order to keep the burning hatred against Israel alive and in order to supply the manpower for the unremitting fight against Israel.

During those more than fifty years, Israel has taken in more than three million Jewish immigrants from all parts of the world and has integrated them productively into its society. According to the "Palestinians", the Arab "refugees" have now marvelously increased to five million(!). It is the intent and fervent desire of the Arabs that all of them should return to Israel so as to destroy the country without the necessity of war.

The "refugees" are a red herring and another myth created by the Arab propaganda machine.

The Arab propaganda machine, aided by the most high-powered public relations firms in the United States and all over, has created myths that, by dint of constant repetition, have been accepted as truth by much of the world. No sensible discussion, no peace in the Middle East, is possible until those Arab myths have been exposed for what they are.

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tives to building. These necessary excursions into other branches of design and teaching only deepened his mastery of the mother art. Incredibly, though he received a diploma in architectural drawing from the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice, he was never officially accredited as an architect. Indeed, in 1956, just as his building career was finally beginning to soar, he was sued by the invidious Venice Association of Architects for practicing without a license; but to the lasting honor of his native city, which he did so much to enhance, he was acquitted of the ludicrous charges.

Also on view in Montreal through early October are fifty of Scarpa's designs for Venetian glassworks, principally the venerable Venini firm. "Carlo Scarpa in Murano: Art Glass by an Architect (1926-1947)," at the Museum of Decorative Arts, provides an enlightening companion piece to his architectural work, because he worked out many of his major ideas in that "minor" medium years before he was able to do so in building. From the age of twenty onward, Scarpa began to grapple with how to create indisputably modern objects that nonetheless draw on the lessons of great precedents without being crassly imitative. Among the vases, the bowls, and the other vessels that indicate Scarpa's innate feel for the inherent qualities of a material (a gift that he held in common with Wright) are several pieces that announce his virtuosic ability to take traditional forms—whether Roman, Chinese, Islamic, or Renaissance—to simplify them greatly, and to inflect them sufficiently to make them fully his own.

The gravity with which Scarpa infused these ostensibly decorative objects recalls also the still-life compositions being produced at the same time by Morandi, who likewise gave his paintings of grouped bottles, jugs, and flasks the weightiness of architecture. (In 1970, Scarpa designed a Morandi retrospective at the Royal Academy in London.) Taken as a whole, Scarpa's command of a wide range of fabrication techniques, his refined sense of color, and his judicious sense of research as the fount of creativity confirm him as the supreme Italian glass designer of this century.

COMPLICATING THE RE-USE of history for Scarpa throughout his career—which began in the early years of Mussolini and ended in the worst year of the Red Brigades—was the way in which architectural tradition was sullied in Italy under the Fascists. Mussolini used a watered-down and pumped-up version of the Classical vocabulary to evoke Roman imperial antecedents in the cynical service of his brutal regime, thereby poisoning the validity of historical form in his country for decades after his downfall. After the war, Scarpa and his like-minded contemporaries scanned the world horizon for a figure who embodied "the architecture of democracy" that they wished to foster in their homeland.

They looked most hopefully to Frank Lloyd Wright, who detested all overt revivalism and whose astonishing creative resurgence had returned him to international eminence after decades of neglect. In 1951, Wright went to Venice (where he met Scarpa) for an exhibition of his work, and a year later he was asked to design a small palazzo on the Grand Canal for an architectural library dedicated to the memory of Angelo Masieri, one of Scarpa's closest collaborators and friends, and a fellow Wright enthusiast, who died in a car crash after visiting the master at Taliesin. This project fell through because of the rising sentiment that contemporary architecture would compromise the touristic charm of the historic city (a misapprehension that Scarpa later repeatedly disproved); but Wright's advocacy of organic design fell on fertile ground among the emergent generation of Italian architects.

Wright's use of integral ornament—worked directly into building materials such as molded concrete block, or handcrafted in details reiterating themes stated elsewhere in a structure—ran counter to the International Style's ban on applied decoration. The greatest American modernist and the most outspoken foe of the International Style inspired Scarpa to use embellishments that are of a building rather than on it, just as Wright said a house should be of a hill rather than on it. Such characteristic Scarpa motifs as horizontal rows of parallel lines stepped outward or inward to imply a molding can be traced directly to Wright's work, which seemed to offer a third way to his young Italian admirers.

Yet Wright's architecture, with its profoundly rooted sense of place, could not be transplanted as readily as the International Style, the supposed universality of which meant that the same building could be erected on virtually any site anywhere. Scarpa came to understand that he must seek the spirit of his own *paese* for inspiration, just as Wright had looked to the prairies of the Midwest for his revolutionary approach to site-driven design. However admirable the Phoenix of Taliesin might be, it was impossible to adapt his houses for Chicago suburbs to the Veneto, or (as Wright himself attempted) to bring a late version of his 1920s California villas to Venice itself. But Scarpa found in his region's indigenous crafts, traditional materials, and characteristic colors—faded pink, Titian red, Byzantine gold—an authenticity that no amount of foreign influence could alter.

IF YOU SPEND time among Italian architects, the word *interventi* is bound to come up in the first few minutes of conversation, and the subtitle of the present exhibition rightly echoes that concept, which is essential to understanding Scarpa. Interventions with existing architecture have long formed the basis of architectural practice in Italy. Its ancient history and its omnipresent artistic heritage have always encouraged the recycling of old buildings. The American-style obliteration of the still-usable past seems in the Italian context not only economically wasteful, but also culturally destructive. In the aggrandizement of the Roman mausoleum of Hadrian into the Castel Sant'Angelo, or in the retrofitting of the medieval heart of Siena as a modern banking center, or in the adaptation of the Renaissance office complex of the Medicis into the Uffizi picture gallery, or in the conversion of nineteenth-century industrial structures in Milan into the multifunctional *spazi* beloved by contemporary fashion designers, adaptive re-use can be said to have begun in Italy and to have found its fullest application there.

So it was with the Palazzo Abatellis in Palermo, which within a generation of its completion in the late fifteenth century became a monastery. It was badly damaged during World War II, after which it was designated to house the medieval and modern art collections of the Sicilian state. Scarpa was approaching fifty when he received his first major museum commission in 1953-54, the internal remodeling of the Palazzo Abatellis for the National Gallery of Sicily. He was brought into the project once the fabric of the building had been secured by other architects. Working on a small budget and against a tight deadline, he was charged with the creation of gallery spaces and new installation components.

Scarpa's responses were nothing short of astounding. Rejecting the notion that a building's past lives should, or could, be concealed, he openly treated the historic structure as a palimpsest. This notion became one of his most influential contributions to contemporary architecture. In Mildred Friedman's excellent catalog essay on Scarpa's significance to present-day practitioners, the architect Jorge Silvetti sums up the master's non-invasive and yet revelatory approach:

> The slab of travertine that he adds next to a medieval stone wall acts as an emblem of his architecture. Such a sliver of space joins them . . . yet at the same time it

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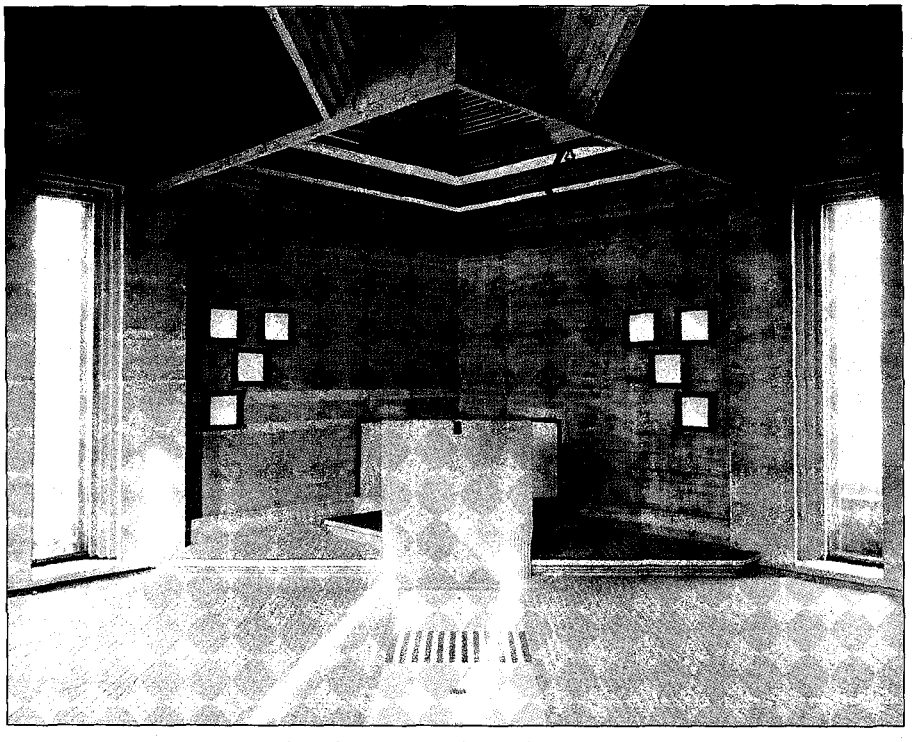
> literally separates them, puts air in between, and . . . makes unequivocal what is new and what is old; that slice of space is also the space of his signature.

The accidental contributions of time were welcomed by Scarpa, who never sought superficial perfection. Re-opening a quarry to find the exact match for old stonework—a practice not unheard-of among historic preservationists—never would have occurred to him. In his work, awkward joints between earlier portions of a building were exalted rather than effaced, though the architect labored mightily to make his own *interventi* as suave as possible. He would study closely the color and the texture of the buildings that he was entrusted to improve, but he was improvisational enough to know that handsome results could be achieved in a variety of ways; and he often worked directly with craftsmen on site to do so.

Some of the walls at the Palazzo Abatellis were plastered in a natural off-white tone or tinted a velvety light olive-green, while others were left in their original exposed masonry; but all were deemed worthy as backdrops for painting and sculpture. Scarpa's unpretentious but exquisitely wrought display devices, given their first major exposure in the Palermo museum and further developed in his extension of the Canova Plaster Cast Gallery of 1955-57 in Possagno, helped to change the way in which art objects are presented to the public. Plinths of rough concrete, sculpture bases combining raw welded steel with smoothly polished ebony, and clamp-like metal brackets jutting out from walls and even suspending objects in midair, knocked traditional art off its cliché pedestal and gave a modern immediacy to works centuries old, a technique now followed in museums around the world, though not often with Scarpa's finesse of finish or attention to detail.

Sensitive to how certain pieces were originally intended to be viewed, Scarpa strived to approximate such settings whenever practicable. At the Palazzo Abatellis, he positioned an anonymous fifteenth-century fresco of *The Triumph of Death* in the apse of the Gothic chapel of the former monastery, the better to convey the painting's dramatic impact when approached at the end of a long enfilade. The fresco is visible a second time from the upper story of the museum, where visitors can look down on it from a balcony that allows this disturbing composition to become part of a sequence of religious works dealing with the life cycle.

Perhaps Scarpa's most impressive installation, daring in its simplicity, is his addition to the Canova museum in Possagno, which preserves the plaster working casts of the great Neoclassical sculptor. In a period when white walls had become a museological article of faith, Scarpa was not afraid to use color, often saturated, when he thought it appropriate for specific galleries. Yet rather than contrasting Canova's monochromatic sculptures against deeper backgrounds, he made a more risky decision. He kept the walls of his new galleries light to maximize reflectivity, and used tall, narrow clerestory windows cut at right angles into the corners of the cubic galleries to flood the casts with natural illumination. Though Canova has been accused of being an "erotic Frigidaire," his figures have never seemed more animated or more sensuous than they do in Scarpa's warming bath of daylight at Possagno.



Chapel, Brion Family Tomb, 1969–78

Scarpa's third great gallery scheme—and his most complex—was for the Castelvecchio Museum of 1956-73 in Verona, a fourteenth-century fortress that successively became a barracks under the Napoleonic occupation and a museum in the 1920s, when the bastion was gussied up with pseudo-Gothic details and fake Renaissance decor. As Ranalli observes:

> Rather than viewing restoration as the opposite of renovation, Scarpa embarked on an intriguing strategy of demolition, change, and modification. He layered history, allowing each historical moment to come alive and take its place next to the others. Essentially functioning as a curator in deciding how to treat each fragment of the existing structure, he removed some elements, restored others, and interspersed new ones. He was able to achieve this while setting up a dialogue between old and new, provoking the older elements into conversation with wholly invented new forms, surfaces, textures, and motifs.

Though applied here to a single scheme, it is easy to see why Scarpa's inclusive approach to existing architecture has had a direct bearing on current attitudes in urbanism, which regard cities as worthy accretions rather than as slates waiting to be wiped clean by every new generation.

The jewel of Castelvecchio is Scarpa's *sacello*, or treasure chest, a small, reliquary-like structure built to house a few remarkable Longobardic antiquities. The exterior of this severe cubic container is faced with a syncopated checkerboard pattern of small, rose-colored stone squares, alternatingly rough-hewn and matt-finished, that impart an almost Byzantine sparkle and sumptuousness. Inside, dark olive-green plaster walls and a concealed skylight add to the air of mystery, and concentrate attention on the precious objects at hand.

Epitomizing Scarpa's genius for revitalization is the care with which he considered the placement of the Castelvecchio Museum's most famous artifact, an equestrian statue of the medieval condottiere Cangrande della Scala. After contemplating several locations for the white marble sculpture, the architect decided to perch it on a second-story bridge in a

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loggia that he created to separate the Napoleonic addition from the medieval fortress. Slightly angling the effigy of horse and rider to emphasize its autonomy from the architecture, and to increase its visibility from several directions, he put it where visitors must pass several times during their route through the galleries, encountering it each time from a different perspective. I. M. Pei wished to achieve a similar masterstroke by placing a sculpture on a towering pedestal beneath the glass pyramid of his Grand Louvre renovation of 1983-89, but conservators would not allow his first choice, the *Victory of Samothrace,* to be exposed in such a precarious position; and even if they had agreed, the celebrated relic would have seemed like little more than a grand hood ornament in that ferociously high-keyed setting, devoid of the more resonant context within which Scarpa placed Verona's Cangrande.

That Arm Again

A man holding up his arm in a restaurant,
holding his arm up by the elbow.
This was long ago in a communist country.
The man was rushing between the tables
with his eyes on his arm.
Blood was moving down his forearm
in separate trails. There was blood
on the man's white apron. The man was

winding in and out between tables.
A smaller man ran at his side as if
the injured man were holding a cake that might
at any moment slide off a platter.
And the arm—the man with the arm
looked like he was thinking:
I must return it.
It appears now that it was never mine.

Lee Upton

TWO YEARS AFTER he met Kahn during a trip to the United States, Scarpa embarked on his masterpiece, the Brion Family Tomb of 1969-78 in San Vito d'Altivole. If religious architecture in the twentieth century has fallen on hard times, then funerary art has fallen into the abyss. There are only a handful of great modern structures that deal with death, and they include Gunnar Asplund's Crematorium of 1935-40 at Stockholm South Cemetery and Aldo Rossi's San Cataldo Cemetery of 1971-84 in Modena. Scarpa's Brion Family Tomb must surely be ranked among them.

Giuseppe Brion was the founder, with his wife, of Brion-Vega, the electronics manufacturer in Milan renowned during the 1950s and 1960s for commissioning some of the period's most innovative talents to produce radios, televisions, and hi-fi equipment that were among the best of postwar Italian design. After her husband's death in 1968, Onoria Brion thought in similar terms of aesthetic excellence and approached Scarpa to create a distinguished final resting place in a small village graveyard in the Veneto for these committed patrons of modern design. The architect saw the project as a chance to give full voice to ideas that he had been nurturing for some time. "All great architecture is rational," Scarpa said, "but great art is created only when spiritual and imaginative elements appear in it—the irrational, which constitutes its inspired, creative function." Above all, he wished to address in built form what he called "the great open questions in which modern rational thinking has no place."

Scarpa conceived the large, inverted L-shaped plot in an outer corner of the cemetery in terms of a spiritual journey through a metaphorical landscape. An inward-tilting, concrete peripheral rampart sets the site apart from its varied surroundings—farm fields in one direction, houses in another, with the cemetery's conventional funerary monuments ranked in grid patterns between the arms of the L. (At the innermost angle, just outside the Brion wall, is Scarpa's own grave, marked by a flat marble slab.) With its several pools and water channels, the Brion precinct seems to float like an island, like the walled island cemetery of San Michele in the Venetian lagoon. But the immured Brion tomb, with its clusters of columnar cypresses and its watery reflections, also brings to mind Arnold Böcklin's *Island of the Dead* of 1880, completed a year before the Venetian necropolis that Scarpa knew since earliest childhood and where he built tombs in the 1940s.

The visitor's procession through the grounds of the Brion tomb is as carefully controlled as that of a classical Japanese stroll garden, with sightlines restricted and perspectives directed to foster an impression of limitless space. The disposition of the three major elements in three corners of the site maximizes one's experience of the whole. The cubiform chapel (rotated ninety degrees within the grid of the cemetery) and the rectangular water pavilion each occupy a far end of the L, with the circular burial vault of the Brions equidistant at the right angle between them.

The illusion of infinite extension begins with the propylaeum, a tightly enclosed concrete entry corridor that recalls Wright's restricted transitional spaces, which make the spaces beyond them seem the larger in contrast. At the entry, one wall of that walkway is punctuated by an aperture of two large overlapping circles, the perimeters of which are outlined with thin mosaic borders, one in blue, the other in gold. (Scarpa repeated the motif in small marble inlays behind the chapel altar.) This modern reiteration of the ancient symbol of marital fidelity and eternity—two intertwined rings—frames a poignant first glimpse of the gravesite, with its pair of marble sarcophagi set just below grade beneath a low, bridge-like canopy, angled to be visible from the far ends of the L. Hugely affecting, the vista through the double-ringed opening recalls the words from Wilde's *Salome*: "And the mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death."

The propylaeum leads both to the water pavilion, a contemplative space with an atmosphere of Eastern repose, and in the opposite direction around a corner to the chapel, which can also be entered more directly by means of an outer gate next to it, along a path that there, too, turns the act of entry into a processional event. The Catholic chapel itself, devoid of Christian symbolism, is a deeply moving place, one of those rare works of modern architecture that communicates not intellectually but emotionally, even spiritually. The precast concrete exterior is almost classical, with its symmetrical entry door and rhythmically repeated motifs—tall narrow windows framed by pilaster-like panels beneath a step-banded cornice.

The chapel's interior, a dark angular volume of concrete walls beneath a ziggurat-stepped ceiling, is unremitting in its solemnity. The grave-sized slab of marble set flush into the mosaic floor at the foot of the lectern-like altar—a minimalist abstraction of the catafalque—leaves no doubt that this is a funerary monument, a place for the inevitable hour. The narrow ceiling-high windows, the skylight at the apex of the coffered ceiling, and a series of four small square, hinged alabaster panels on either side of the altar all admit slanting rays of light that mitigate the gloom and allude to the cosmos. The scale is at once intimate and monumental, focusing on the individual tragedy of death while elevating the personal into the realm of the transcendent.

This, in the end, is what the sublimely enigmatic architecture of Scarpa accomplishes at its best. His work has sometimes

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been dismissed as too personal to be emulated, but such a criticism misses the entire point of what he achieved with such depth of passion. Scarpa wanted architecture everywhere to be more alive to its own time, but also more alive to all that had gone before it; to be one with its surroundings, but also to make a place more vivid than had been there before. "The problems involved are the same as ever," he said humbly; and then he added, not so humbly, "Only the answer changes." ■

The Era of Error

By MICHAEL IGNATIEFF

The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century by François Furet

(University of Chicago Press, 596 pp., $35)

TEN YEARS ON, it is apparent that we misunderstood the meaning of 1989 then and we misunderstand it now. Loose talk about the end of history is to blame. It led us to think that communism was over. Ten years on, it obviously is not over. Slobodan Milosevic's regime remains communist in essence, if authoritarian-populist in form. Milosevic created a playground zone of media freedom and a façade of political pluralism in order to conceal the unregenerately communist character of his regime: the Leninist-conspiratorial approach to politics itself; the corrupt appropriation of the economy by the ruling elite; the predatory role of the secret police; the anemic dependency of civil society; the chauvinistic paranoia of public discourse. It is all there—bombed, defeated, but still standing, the last living example of what communism did to politics in Europe.

And not just in Europe. The flag that flies over China still displays a hammer and sickle. North Korea, that grotesque combination of rocketry and starvation, continues to menace its neighbors. In Russia, communism lives on as an active political party and as an undrained swamp of nostalgia for Stalinist authoritarianism. Yet nostalgia does not quite do justice to the emotions of those who long for a restoration of Stalinism. In a forthcoming BBC documentary called "Gulag," made by Angus McQueen, it is not nostalgia that seems to inspire the testimony of the concentration camp guards, interrogators, and prison administrators so much as blithe moral anesthesia. In McQueen's film, old women sit by the Moscow-Volga Canal remembering when the prisoners who built it died of exhaustion and were thrown into the concrete mixers and their bodies walled into the canal locks. In other sequences, aging camp guards, proudly wearing their medals and uniforms, display the meticulously pornographic drawings that they made of the sexual torture and humiliation of female inmates in the prison archipelago of the Russian Far East. The confessions are shame-free.

But how can they be otherwise? Despite Solzhenitsyn, Sakharov, Akhmatova, and all the heroic witnesses, the Soviet past remains unmastered by the society at large. For most Russians of a certain age, the horror of the gulag is not structural but incidental. They remember the health care, and forget the terror; they remember the universal education and the factory holidays in Crimea, and forget the torture and the disappearance of their friends. These illusions of memory are tenacious and highly dangerous. The West continues to be faced with a powerful society, equipped with nuclear weapons and incapable of democracy as long as it equates democracy with the loss of Father Stalin.

Democracy does not stand a chance in Russia unless this vile nostalgia is disgraced. Since the society is never likely to de-Stalinize, or to establish a Truth Commission to complete official atonement and public recognition, the generation with living memories of Stalin will have to die off before Russia can lay communism to rest. And these considerations mean that François Furet's book is not quite about an illusion whose time has passed. Its real subject is an illusion that refuses to die.

This powerful book first appeared in Paris in 1995, before Furet's death, and it is now published in a fluent and convincing translation by his American widow. Furet was one of the great barons of French academic life, witty, worldly-wise, and cynical as only an ex-Communist could be. In his introduction, Furet refers obliquely to his own membership in the Communist Party, saying only that it began in 1949 and ended in 1956 with the Soviet invasion of Hungary. He looks upon his youthful illusions with serenity:

> Forty years later I judge my erstwhile blindness with neither indulgence nor acrimony.... [That] unfortunate engagement taught me something. I came away from Communism with a curiosity about the revolutionary passion and with an immunity to pseudo-religious investment in political action.

At the time of his death in 1997, Furet was a member of the Académie Française, a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor, and a professor at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes; but he was not a narrowly French figure. He was free of the anti-Americanism and the Anglophobia that impoverishes French intellectual life, and taught regularly at the University of Chicago. In France, he enjoyed popular success—and academic respect—for his *Interpreting the French Revolution*, a briskly iconoclastic essay on the idea of the French Revolution that challenged the soporific pieties of socialism and republicanism alike. Furet argued boldly that the French revolutionary tradition was over; that it had lost its capacity to divide France and to inspire change with a re-commitment to its ideals. And *The Passing of an Illusion* continues Furet's rigorous autopsy on the corpse of Enlightenment dreams. In his account, the October Revolution of 1917 was an attempt to complete the work of 1789. Viewed in this light, the question is how the promise of liberation—common to both revolutions—was so thoroughly betrayed in the twentieth century, and why so many left intellectuals should have been so blind to the unfolding catastrophe.

It should be said at once that this is a great book: passionate yet Olympian mordant yet humane. It is not a history of communism, but of communism's central illusions. Furet rightly argues that these were a force in their own right, and that the "fascination that ideas exert on passions is a more reliable guide than an analysis of interests." Communism was never just the vehicle of the interests of the workers, any more than liberalism is the vehicle of the bourgeoisie or fascism the creature of "Big Capital." Indeed, the illusions of twentieth-century totalitarianism might have been less destructive had they

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been more instrumental. But it was their total independence of interests, and of practical calculation, and finally of rationality itself, that made them ruinous. They inspired men and women to betray their instincts, to denounce their friends, to lay down their lives.

THE CENTRAL ILLUSION was the idea that communism was a science of history, capable of revealing Time's hidden logic; and that the Communist Party was the agent of this science, helping Time to unfold as it must, in the inevitable triumph of the proletariat. This illusion, Furet writes, did not "accompany Communist history: it made it." Without this illusion, the full nightmare of Communist power would never have been achieved. Only the very faithful, the very credulous, could continue in the service of a God that failed from the very beginning. The moral message of Furet's essay is clear enough. If communism's root illusion was the idea of historical necessity—which justified every crime and excused every mistake—it follows that "a true understanding of our time is possible only when we free ourselves from the illusion of necessity." And, it might be added, from the necessity of illusion.

Why did generations of intelligent people succumb? Why did so many intellectuals voluntarily put on the chains? Communism, Furet argues, should be properly understood as a chapter in the history of European bourgeois self-hatred. It appealed primarily to discontented bourgeois because it diagnosed central contradictions in bourgeois life. The bourgeoisie was committed to the universalistic ideals of 1789, but it knew that it was living a lie.

> Bourgeois society is thus animated by a corpuscular agitation, constantly driving it forward. Yet this agitation tends to deepen the contradictions in that society's very existence; for not only does the bourgeoisie consist of associates who care little for the public interest, but the idea of universality and the equality of man, which it claims as its foundation and its primary innovation, is constantly negated by the inequality of property and wealth produced by the competition of its members. Its development belies its principle, and its dynamic undercuts its legitimacy. . . .They detested revolution, while owing it everything.

And so they began also to detest themselves. "Far from incarnating what is universal, the bourgeoisie had but one obsession, their own interests, and but one symbol, money."

Communism's accomplishment, and the source of its appeal, was to formalize the terms of the bourgeoisie's guilty conscience, its remorse at its failure to practice what it preached. And communism expressed also the aesthetic self-loathing of the bourgeoisie, its secret belief that money twisted the soul and that it knew the price of everything and the value of nothing. In this sense, the rise of communism was inseparable from the rise of Romanticism, the artistic rejection of all that was narrow, miserly, and vulgar about bourgeois capitalism.

Rage, self-loathing, and aesthetic disdain combined to generate an eschatological longing for an escape from what Marx called the "narrow horizon of bourgeois right." Though it purported to be a science of history, communism actually promised its believers an escape from history, a leap beyond the flat horizon of bourgeois life into a realm of justice and equality, abundance and fraternity. This vision of communist paradise may have been wholly unrealistic, but it certainly mobilized the emotions of true believers and sustained their abiding hatred of the world as it was.

FASCISM SHARED THE same furious hatred of the bourgeoisie, the same loathing for bourgeois civility and order and profit and prudence, the same intoxication with political violence and ideological extremism. Furet treats communism as fascism's brother- enemy. He observes that Hitler never stinted in his respect for Bolshevik fanaticism. As he told Herman Rauschning in 1934, "there is more that binds us to Bolshevism than separates us from it.... The petit bourgeois Social Democrat and the trade-union boss will never make a National Socialist, but the communist always will." But whereas communism saw itself as the self-conscious bearer of the universal values of 1789, fascism explicitly rejected the universal in favor of the nation and the individual. If communism was, in Furet's phrase, "the pathology of the universal," fascism was "the pathology of the national." Both ideologies hated each other, in Furet's words, "not only for what separated them but also for what made them alike."

They also shared a similar eschatology. Both conceived the public sphere as a place deserted by religion, "as a pure creation of human will." Fascism filled the public square with a ranting demagogue, communism with the tramping feet of the workers. Both wanted to turn the public sphere from the realm of politics into the realm of spectacle, from the deliberative sphere of citizens into the circus of true belonging. Both fascism and communism loathed mere democracy as much as they loathed mere accumulation. Both hated moral and political individualism: the idea that a nation's destiny should depend on the sovereign judgment of separate individuals. For the fascists, this meant that national destiny would be decided by Jews, by individuals lacking a truly organic, racial connection to the national interest. For the communists, political individualism and popular sovereignty meant democracy rigged in favor of the bourgeoisie.

FURET LAYS BARE an unintended consequence of the European reckoning with the Holocaust: that it gave renewed intellectual and moral validity to communism. By turning Nazism into the unique moral abomination of the century, liberal thought inadvertently allowed the Soviet experiment a further lease on life. A good deal of communism's moral credit after 1945 was owed to the Soviet Union's decisive role in defeating Hitler. In the process, of course, a concentration camp universe stretching from the Urals to the Pacific was hidden from view. By treating fascism and communism as twin monsters, however, Furet breaks decisively with the tradition that continued to defend the Soviet Union, even after its crimes were known, simply because it had helped to defeat fascism. And by insisting that communism shared with Nazism the same loathing for liberal democracy and liberal decency, he helps also to dismantle the idea of Nazism as either a specially German—or a specially insane—form of the politics of hatred.

Furet also helps one to understand why it remains difficult for bourgeois liberals to concede that communism was just as terrible a tyranny as Nazism. For the pathology of the universal always seems more pardonable to children of 1789 than the pathology of the national. Communist brethren always claimed that they defended the same universals as liberals did; and because liberals were uneasily aware of the failure of liberal societies to live up to these ideals, many were indulgent—criminally so—toward the Soviet failure to do so. Furet's analysis leads to the disturbing thought that universalistic rhetoric—"mankind," "the human race," "workers of the world," and so on—is probably responsible for more corpses than the particularistic rhetoric associated with "nation" and "race."

Neither communism nor fascism would ever have become ruling creeds in the twentieth century, moreover, if bourgeois society had not thrown itself into the abyss in 1914. It was World War I that transformed them both into beliefs that spoke to the resentment, the exhaustion, and the disgust of the men who returned from the trenches. Twentieth-century democracy was a creation of war, and war

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gave democracy a totalitarian inflection. The fascist rhetoric of the enemy race and the communist rhetoric of the enemy class both derive from the moral imagination of the trenches. As Furet writes, "the masses erupted onto the European public scene, constituting a political civilization in which the fragile mechanisms of constitutional regimes were short-circuited by primitive forms of popular participation and of parliamentary representation by the identification with a single leader." Without the trenches, neither Hitler nor Lenin.

By locating the roots of the totalitarian temptation in the catastrophe of war, Furet goes a long way toward explaining why the twentieth century witnessed two such determined assaults on liberal democratic principles. For those principles seemed disgraced in 1918. In Furet's words, "Lenin's Soviet Union took the reins of human progress and assumed the spot that revolutionary France had been keeping warm for it since the late eighteenth century." The October Revolution exerted a universal spell over Western European intellectuals—the Eastern intellectuals learned the harsh realities more quickly—because it seemed to rescue 1789 from the ashes of 1918. It seemed to restore faith in the power of human agency at a moment when the carnage on the Western Front seemed to prove that human beings were the helpless playthings of historical forces. Thanks to the association of 1917 with 1789, October could be seen as something more exalted than a coup d'état in a war-ravaged country far away in the East. For the whole European left, it symbolized the resumption of History's forward march. And so it was seen, through thick and mostly through thin, until 1989.

To be sure, Soviet reality soon made this mythology look absurd. And the contradictions were apparent to a few early observers, such as Bertrand Russell in 1920. He came away from a visit to Moscow with scorn for the Soviet regime's weak-minded defenders in the West, who supposed that the dictatorship of the proletariat was merely a new form of representative government. If the nature of Soviet tyranny was apparent to Russell, why was it not apparent to the European intellectuals—to Wells, to Shaw, to the Webbs—who made pilgrimages to Moscow in the 1920s and 1930s? These were founder figures of the British social democratic tradition, and their credulity about the Soviet Union casts the whole social democratic tradition's understanding of democracy into doubt. If these founding fathers and mothers could have been so wrong about Russia, could they have been right about anything else? The whole story is a dolorous case study in the psychology of self-deception. As Saul Bellow once remarked, "A great deal of intelligence can be invested in ignorance when the need for illusion is deep."

In order to unravel the psychology of self-deception, Furet makes a close study of the Hungarian philosopher Georg Lukács. Lukács was the son of a liberal Jewish businessman, and both his Judaism and his bourgeois origins became, for him, a source of shame. As Furet observes, intellectuals often find escape from self-hatred in the pursuit of the universal. For Lukács, communism offered the grandest universalism there was, a science of History that would lift him above his Judaism and his bourgeois origins and associate his life with the redemptive and cleansing force of the proletariat.

Instead of redemption, though, he got humiliation. After serving as deputy commissar for public education in the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic of Bela Kun, Lukács escaped to Moscow, where his *History and Class Consciousness*, completed in 1923, was suppressed by the very regime whose advent it celebrated. After the war, he returned to Hungary and agreed to serve as minister of culture in the government of Imre Nagy, a few days before the arrival of the Soviet tanks. How are we to explain a man who continued to worship an illusion that blighted his life? Furet argues that Lukács was held captive by "an idea of the Soviet Union so potent that it had annulled his knowledge of its history."

Secular faiths such as Marxism left much less room for doubt than religion. Religion knows all about doubt. Since God's ways are unknowable, religion can endure only if it finds a place for self-questioning. Prayer itself is a questioning dialogue with God. But what is Marxism's equivalent of prayer? Since the theory had to be correct, a believer had to disavow the testimony of his own senses; and if reality failed to live up to the promise of theory, then the reality was deficient. In embracing Marxism, a Jewish bourgeois such as Lukács escaped self-hatred at the price of eternal theoretical self-accusation.

Furet's chronicle leaves disturbing questions behind. For he insists that the story of our temptation by utopia is never over. "Democracy, by virtue of its existence, creates the need for a world beyond the bourgeoisie and beyond Capital, a world in which a genuine human community can flourish." What this actually means, if it means anything at all, is unclear. But there is no doubting the meaning of Furet's declara-

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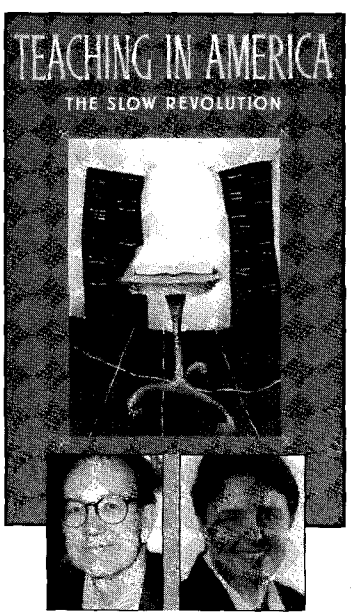

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tion that "the idea of another society has become almost impossible to conceive of.... Here we are condemned to live in the world as it is."

Certainly, the escape hatches into political fantasy have been closed with the demise of communism. And certainly there will always be those who long for a radical otherness, as vague as it is seductive. But for others, freer perhaps of bourgeois self-hatred, the real task of the political imagination is to be genuinely reconciled to what is, and to achieve reconciliation that is not resignation. The virtue of liberalism is—or should be—its deep attachment to what has been achieved already, combined with a conviction that it can be better. Complacency, in any event, is not really a possibility, because liberal society's central commitments—to individual rights and to markets—are in contradiction, and this contradiction stimulates an unending dynamic of change.

ALL THIS FURET sees with admirable clarity; but the liberal rhythm of change is not enough for him. Like many one-time communists, he seems to lament the end of communism as a vision of paradise, fearing that when liberal democracy loses its systemic rival, it will cease to feel the impetus to change and to renew. His pessimism is ungrounded, I think, except in his own experience of eschatological disappointment. In his rueful anxiety about the vitality of liberalism, Furet drastically underestimates the forces of discontent within liberal society. Marxism itself was never guilty of such an underestimation of bourgeois discontent; but Furet should have thought more of the productive future of these contradictions. They guarantee liberal democracy a long if bumpy ride into the future.

Furet seems similarly nostalgic for the metaphysical consolations of communism. He is right to observe that if the core of communism's appeal was essentially religious—it appeared to explain the purpose of Time itself—then the longings that it addressed do not disappear simply because the doctrine is discredited. Furet expresses an odd melancholy at the collapse of the science of history:

> Once again, history has become a tunnel that we enter in darkness, not knowing where our actions will lead, uncertain of our destiny, stripped of the illusory security of a science of what we do. At the end of the twentieth century, deprived of God, we have seen the foundations of deified history crumbling—a disaster that must somehow be averted.

Why should we avert this disaster? Why should we not welcome it? The disaster that Furet has described is surely no disaster at all. The moral of his story, surely, is humility. Marxism disgraced science and religion alike, because it disdained the patience and the modesty appropriate to both. Marxism was a form of Promethean hubris, and all our mythologies, pagan and religious, rightly tell us that human overreaching is justly punished. If we must live within the horizon of bourgeois life, and we must, let us do so without the delusion of faith and the fantasy of false deliverance. ■

Games, Ashes

By JAROSLAW ANDERS

Early Sorrows (For Children and Sensitive Readers) by Danilo Kis translated by Michael Henry Heim

(New Directions, 118 pp., $19.95)

The Book of Blam by Aleksandar Tisma translated by Michael Henry Heim

(Harcourt Brace, 226 pp., $23)

DANILO KIS WAS the first Yugoslav writer to gain international recognition since the Nobel Prize was awarded to Ivo Andric in 1961. He died in Paris in 1989. Two years later, his country collapsed into savagery unprecedented in the West since the Second World War. During the decade of war, mass murder, and ethnic cleansing that followed, Kis's name was often evoked as a rallying cry for those who opposed the carnage. It served as a secret password among the noble few, and sometimes also as a moral alibi for the unimpeachable. The liberal-minded, pro-democratic Serbs claimed Kis as their own (he spent most of his life in Serbia), and adduced him as proof that Serb culture can be refined, sophisticated, and "European."

Those who regretted the passing of the old multinational Yugoslavia claimed Kis, too. The son of a Hungarian Jewish father and a Montenegrin mother, and the best writer in a language that in his day was still called Serbo-Croatian, he was the pride of the Yugoslav nation, the allegations that such a nation never existed notwithstanding. Susan Sontag reported that Kis was especially revered by the intellectuals of besieged Sarajevo in the Bosnian war. During the Yugoslav troubles, volumes of his essays, newspaper articles, and interviews were published and scoured for pertinent ideas. During the recent NATO campaign to drive Milosevic out of Kosovo, there were speculations about what Kis's reaction might have been to Operation Allied Force; his native city Novi Sad, a famously liberal city governed by an anti-Milosevic coalition, was one of the earliest targets of the allied bombing. Kis, in short, is being posthumously transformed into a familiar East European figure: the writer who stands simultaneously for literary excellence and civic virtue, each apparently vouching for the other.

The need for such a cultural hero, for a kind of Yugoslav Havel, is quite understandable, but Kis has been assigned the part mainly by default. This is not to say that he was not a gifted and genuine liberal, and a fervent opponent of nationalism. Judging by the essays and the statements that were collected a few years ago in *Homo Poeticus*, however, Kis was an intensely private person who was preoccupied mainly with questions of aesthetics, and addressed public issues reluctantly and often awkwardly. His most famous "public" text, the passionate, righteous, and occasionally rambling diatribe against nationalism published as "The Gingerbread Heart, or Nationalism," has

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been promoted into a political manifesto, but it was written as a literary polemic. It appeared in Belgrade in 1978 as part of a book-length essay called "The Anatomy Lesson," which was Kis's self-defense against attacks by figures in the Yugoslav literary establishment. The attacks were nasty, marked by charges of plagiarism and by unmistakably nationalist undertones. Kis was accused of "spitting on his people." His alleged preoccupation with Jewish subjects was criticized.

But this was really a generational quarrel within the literary community, ostensibly about the "obligations" toward one's language and one's literary tradition—a quarrel that took place long before it was permissible to imagine the killing fields of Srebrenica. This explains why, after some ardent though abstract denunciations of nationalism ("collective paranoia," "the ideology of banality," "a negative category of the spirit"), Kis uses most of his essay to denounce linguistic pedantry and folkloric kitsch, and to defend the writer's right to rail "at his mother tongue with the fury of a prodigal son." To borrow a line from the Slovene poet Tomas Salamun, Kis battled against "the terror of regional cultures" rather than the terror of political thugs. To claim the latter, to make Kis into the sort of Yugoslav dissident for whom we scour Milosevic's Yugoslavia, is to read his essay anachronistically.

THE BOOK THAT gained Kis international recognition, *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich*, appeared in 1976. Since it tells of Stalinist terror in Russia and international intrigues of the Comintern, it is usually categorized as "dissident literature." Yet a description of Soviet totalitarianism was hardly an act of political defiance in Tito's Yugoslavia, where "anti-Stalinism" was an official policy since the "historic break" between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union in 1948. Indeed, an accusation of Stalinist sympathies was often enough to send one to the infamous prison camp at Goli Otok, a fate that befell Kis's contemporary Dragoslav Mihailovic.

Kis honestly detested any form of "engaged" literature. He insisted that "the description and condemnation of labor camps, punitive psychiatric clinics, and every variety of oppression" defeats poetry and makes man "unidimensional and poor in spirit." He seemed to practice a kind of religion of literature, believing that aesthetic is the proper answer to the tyrannies of history, a "defense against barbarism," and an activity capable of giving "some meaning to the vanity of existence." And to achieve these goals, literature had to remain pure, and refuse to soil itself with social and political obligations.

Kis's own literary energies flowed from two very different sources. The first was the trauma of his wartime childhood in the Yugoslav province of Vojvodina and in Hungary; and the second was his fascination with postmodernist poetics. It is the constant and not always harmonious interplay between these two elements that accounts for much of what is original and arresting, but also occasionally discordant and unresolved, in his work.

His childhood and the wartime lot of his family are the themes of the three books that he called his "family cycle": *Garden, Ashes*, *Hourglass*, and *Early Sorrows*. The latter has now been made available in English in an exquisite translation by Michael Henry Heim, though it is in fact the middle volume of the trilogy. In "Birth Certificate," a laconic autobiographical sketch included both in *Homo Poeticus* and *Early Sorrows*, Kis relates that his Jewish father was born in Western Hungary. His family name was Magyarized by his grandfather, apparently (as Kis remarks with a touch of irony) owing to "the liberal policy of Franz Josef II together with a desire for integration." The writer's mother was a descendant of "a legendary Montenegrin hero who learned to read and write at the age of fifty, thereby adding the glory of the pen to the glory of the sword."

Kis was born in 1935. At the outbreak of the war, his family lived in Novi Sad, a former Austro-Hungarian city with a mixed population of Serbs, Croats, Hungarians, Jews, and Germans, and a center of learning known as the "Serb Athens." In 1939, his parents had him baptized into the Eastern Orthodox rite of his mother. After the German-Hungarian invasion of Vojvodina, the family moved to his father's native region in Hungary, where the young Kis worked as a farmhand, attended school, and received religious instruction—this time in the Roman Catholic church. "At the age of nine," he later recalled, "I wrote my first poems, in Hungarian; one was about hunger, the other was a love poem par excellence." In 1944, his father was taken to Auschwitz, from which he never returned.

This story of muddled identity, constant wandering, and personal tragedy—what the author calls his "troubling strangeness," would later become the chief "literary and metaphysical stimulus" of his work. Kis would strive simultaneously to give his experience a voice and to "defamiliarize" it by means of irony and inventive narrative techniques. This delicate project is already apparent in *Early Sorrows*, though formally the book is the most straightforward and traditional of

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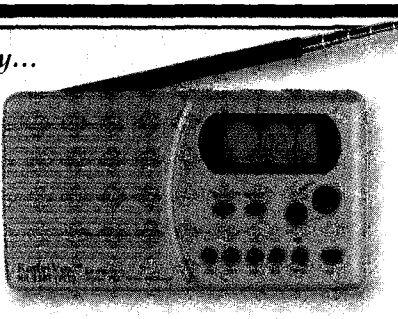

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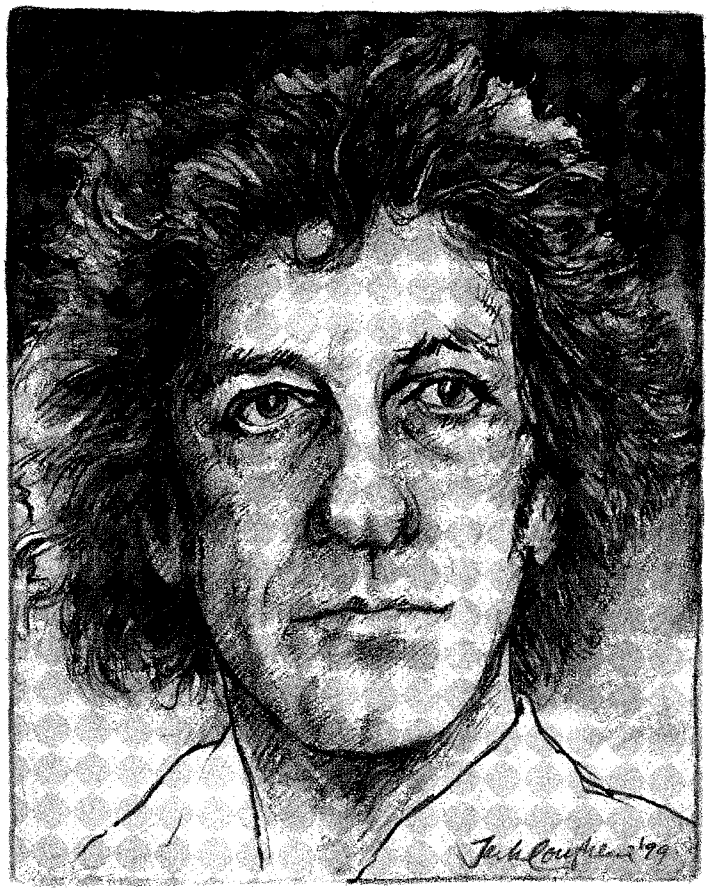
his trilogy. It is a series of short stories, apparently simple vignettes from the childhood of Andreas Sam, a city boy forced to work for Hungarian peasants in order to support his mother and his sister during the war.

In accordance with the conventions of a childhood memoir, innocent children's dramas—a cow lost but quickly recovered, the shame of bedwetting, the terror of early erotic stirring, the sadness at the departure of a circus at the end of summer—are given the same emotional significance as more real and ominous ones. The boy has a gift for words that makes him something of a curiosity, but he is also a hero among the peasant kids; and although most of the stories are told in the third person, we are convinced that we hear his own bewildered—and surprisingly mature—voice. He suffers from hunger, which he makes the subject of one of his school compositions, winning high praise from his teacher. He has to perform menial household tasks for his teacher to earn his meal. He is humiliated, and tries to protect himself by the power of his imagination, when he is unable to pay a doctor for the sulphur needed to treat his and his sister's scabies. He works as a stable boy and observes the death of two sick army horses.

And all these sorrows are met by the child's unlimited capacity for enchantment. He has the power to transform even the most somber experiences into sensual and aesthetic adventures. "It was snowing, and the wind flung handfuls of needle-like crystals against the window and under the door. The pine cones in the stove hissed like saliva on burning lips," the feverish boy observes as he hides from the cold in the stable. When he falls asleep after completing the disgusting task of cleaning his teacher's chicken coop, he visualizes a scarlet rose that he spotted in the garden: "It gleams in his consciousness with such force that for an instant, squeezing his eyes shut at its overpowering brilliance, he can smell its aroma, the aroma of paprika. Those are the last things he can make out: the sudden aroma and the brilliance. That scarlet blaze."

Reading these sad and poetic tales, one begins to suspect that this is not the whole story, or the real story; that there is a ghastly mystery lurking somewhere within the folds of the narrative. The war is almost never mentioned. Still, there are clues scattered throughout the book. The boy finds some abandoned kittens and, having failed to save them, murders them with shocking brutality and rage, because "there's no justice in this world.... Among people or cats." In the apparently lyrical episode of the departing circus, the figure of the boy's father, who is barely present throughout the book, appears in the boy's peripheral vision rummaging with his cane among garbage, and reading scraps of newspapers smeared with human feces.



Danilo Kis by Jack Coughlin for The New Republic

In a story called "The Pogrom," the boy is overwhelmed by a mob looting a Jewish store. The scene is horrifying, but it is also grotesque and occasionally comical. He is both frightened and reassured by being a part of the crowd: "I stood my ground outside the entrance to the warehouse, clinging to men's coats, women's skirts, pressed in this direction and pushed in that, but always returning through the forest of legs, borne on by fear, convinced that here in the heart of the danger I was safer from these people, knowing that I must not withdraw from the shelter of their rage, that I must not retract one inch from their tentacular mass or they would grab me and trample me underfoot." The boy's unerring instinct for survival suggests that he knows much more about his situation than the narrator is willing to reveal.

In "The Game," Andreas impersonates his Jewish grandfather, a feather merchant whom he calls Max Ahasuerus. How he conceived the idea of the game, or whether he is aware of its meaning, is less important than the unsettling reaction of his parents. His mother, who had obviously tried to conceal his Jewish origins from her son, responds with a mixture of horror, disappointment, and guilt. His father, who watches the game through a keyhole, "rejoiced in advance, looking forward to her secret suffering, knowing she would be incapable of arguing with his proofs even in the silence of her inner self once she had seen what he would show her, namely, her little Fair-Haired Boy, her Andreas going from picture to picture with his sales pitch as if wandering through centuries. And that would hurt her."

But finally, near the end of the book, both the reader and the protagonist are forced to look directly at the terrifying hidden core of the tale. An unlikable aunt, the only member of the father's family who returned from the camps, lights a candle on a menorah. No words are spoken, but the boy instantly fills the silence with images:

> Aunt Rebecca's spiteful eyes hinted at the bitter, tragic truth: walking in the column of poor, weak souls, among panic-stricken women and terrified children, plodding along with them, alongside them, tall and bent, without his glasses, without his cane—they had been taken from him—dazed, shuffling in the column of victims like a shepherd amidst his flock, like a rabbi with his congregation, like a teacher surrounded by his pupils... No, not that. They beat him with their clubs and the butts of their rifles; he moaned and fell; the women buoyed him up, raised him off the ground, while he—alas!—crying like a baby, spread the awful stench of his traitorous intestines.

Thus the vision of the final degradation of his father—the founding truth of the tale that has been delayed and concealed behind the façade of a *Bildungsroman*—is finally revealed. And with this revelation Kis undoes the literary convention of the "coming-of-age" story, and perhaps the

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idea of coming-of-age as well.

All three books of the "family cycle" are built around the central moment of the father's disappearance, but each of them tries to disguise the story as something else. The game in *Garden, Ashes* is probably the most intricate. The reader is given enough information to reconstruct the general sequence of events. The Scham family (this is the spelling chosen by the translator of the novel) is forced to leave its middle-class neighborhood in Novi Sad. We see them constantly on the move, their material situation growing more and more dire. On one occasion, a mob tries to break into their home. There are intimations of some horrible and humiliating things happening to the father, Eduard Scham, who often disappears from his home and whose mental state is clearly deteriorating. The boy is suffering from nightmares and is afraid to fall asleep.

THIS, SURELY, IS the story of a Jewish family running from its persecutors. And yet the plot sometimes turns phantasmagoric and surreal. The narrator of the novel, Andreas Scham, constantly substitutes illusions for reality, and tries to bury the facts under layers of dream-like fantasy. In his imagination, the coming war is heralded by a herd of black buffalo that inexplicably appear from a suburban park, "marching fearlessly with a Prussian step toward the swamps." He insists that the reason for his family's misfortunes must be the book that the father has been writing: though it seems to be nothing more than a travel guide, it appears to the boy as a compendium of all existing knowledge, as "an apocryphal, sacral bible in which the miracle of genesis was repeated, yet in which all divine injustices and the impotence of man were rectified." Some mysterious tribunal must have condemned the book—submitted for publication, and rejected, in 1939—and sentenced the Scham family to endless wandering.

The father appears sometimes as a miserable drunk and a madman, sometimes as a shrewd dissembler, sometimes as a philosopher at war with the world—a religious prophet "obsessed by his vision and on the fringes of real life." When he finally disappears, and his last letter, in which he complains about the dirty collars of his shirts, is tossed from a sealed cattle-car and delivered to the family, the narrator speculates about the reason for his subsequent silence: "He was ashamed, or else some important affairs prevented him from writing." Even when the truth of the father's death can no longer be dodged, Andreas, now a grown man, contends that he sees him occasionally disguised as a foreign tourist and pretending not to recognize his son. "What bothers us and keeps us from giving ourselves over to the blissful recording of facts," the narrator remarks toward the end of the novel, "is the muddy tale of my father, woven together from one unreality after another. The term should not be misunderstood: my father's memory is more real than any other memory of my childhood, but he is artfully hiding behind one of his numerous masks, changing roles with unprecedented agility, concealing his true face, resorting to the most perfidious simulations." This statement, of course, is another deception; for it is the son who is "artfully hiding" the father, so as to extract him from the unbearable reality, and to make him, at least imaginatively, invulnerable.

HOURGLASS, THE FINAL volume in Kis's cycle, is clearly the darkest and the most cryptic. In some places it recalls Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*, in other places Beckett's early novels. The book centers on the father, now identified only by the initials E.S., who appears totally alone, his family removed to the background of the story. It is his long farewell to a world that looks darkened and moribund. But this is vouchsafed only at the end of the novel, when the reader is provided the full text of E.S.'s last letter to his sister describing the real sequence of events.

Until the appearance of this letter, the book is a mosaic of seemingly random scenes, episodes, and meditations—some verging on the grotesque, some filled with a dark and elegiac lyricism. A briefcase full of offal, a wartime trophy, is snatched by dogs; a train trip in the company of an unknown beautiful woman ends in E.S's humiliation when he is removed from the first-class car; the protagonist is forced by soldiers to spend a day in a hard labor detail; an empty house suddenly collapses when E.S. visits it for the last time. What is more, those events are related in four different and constantly shifting modes, or "movements," as the writer calls them: as a straightforward, objective description of external facts, as a series of internal monologues, as a sequence of questions and answers, and as an "interrogation" during which some hostile entity tries to pry the facts from a visibly exhausted and confused "witness." And the most dramatic event of the story—the hero being lined up for execution, and then inexplicably released—is presented, characteristically, in a single interrupted sentence. (We learn its meaning from a translator's note!) As in the other novels, a zone of silence surrounds the narrative core of this novel.

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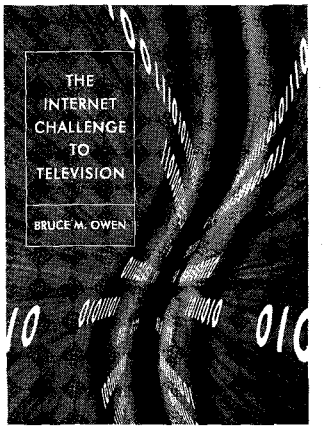

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that are introduced into Kis's family saga, serve as a double ironic barrier: they protect both the writer and the reader from being overwhelmed by the sentiment and the pathos of the tale. (Kis once told an interviewer that the struggle between irony and sentiment is "the definition of prose.") In fact, Kis's protagonists and narrators are almost inhumanly detached, as if they no longer inhabited the reality that they describe.

This strange perspective seems to be mostly justified by the very personal nature of the subject—the powerful, obsessive pressure that, in Kis's words, calls for an occasional "bloodletting" in the form of a book. But the fictional strategy also makes Kis's depiction of evil—and the trilogy is finally about the encounter of a young sensibility with radical evil—eerily abstract, phantasmagoric, almost benign. What is more, the writer's obvious fascination with his own formal inventiveness, with his puzzles and his games, occasionally taints his art with artifice, and even with affectation. Sometimes his homages to the modernist gods—Kafka, Schulz, Joyce, Borges, the Russian formalists—are self-conscious and forced. Whenever his tale threatens to become too powerful, Kis feels compelled to inject an obligatory dose of high literary tedium in the form of lists, repetitions, and literary devices such as the lengthy question-and-answer sequences in *Hourglass*, whose only purpose seems to be to slow the natural progress of the story.

TWO CONCEPTIONS OF literature seem to struggle for supremacy in Kis's books. The one thrives on formal ingenuity and allusions to other literary texts, and the other flows from hidden, more private sources. Kis belonged to a generation of East and Central European writers who, in the late '60s and early '70s, suddenly "discovered" literary modernism, which was forbidden to them by local cultural policies. They eagerly learned from the modernist masters, and then from their younger offspring, Robbe-Grillet, Cortazar, Calvino, and Pynchon. They treated them as an aesthetic antidote to the musty epic realism, mixed with obligatory patriotism and official ideology, that was practiced by their elders. The transition was liberating, but it was also disorienting, and it often produced paradoxical results.

In Poland, the formal experimenters and the local postmodernists of the '70s and '80s quickly became the darlings of cultural bureaucrats, because they usually steered clear of political subjects. At the same time, two young poets of "dissident" provenance, Julian Kornhauser and Adam Zagajewski, wrote a manifesto that called for a literature that looked very much like a new form of social (though certainly not socialist) realism. In Yugoslavia, there appeared a whole group of Borges imitators, the most interesting of whom was the Serb writer Milorad Pavic, whose novel *The Dictionary of the Khazars* purports to explore, in the form of encyclopedic entries and scholarly references, the "true" identity of the mysterious tribe that in the course of its history alternated between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Pavic, a professor of literature and a quintessential "university writer," soon became an apologist for Milosevic's policies, proving that in today's Serbia one can be a postmodernist and a nationalist at the same time.

Kis embraced postmodernist poetics enthusiastically—he divided the art of the short story into "pre-Borges" and "post-Borges"—but not without a certain ambivalence. Writing about Nabokov, for example, he accurately pointed out the Russian writer's unwillingness to confront one of the most troubling evils of our age.

> Hell as antithesis, the radical evil of our century—Nabokov had no desire to consider them or approach the flames more closely than is permitted to mortal man. For there reign chaos, sound and fury, its landscapes are gray and cruel like Kolyma of the unfortunate Varlam Shalamov. Where civilization and culture have ceased to exist, where man's spiritual and moral qualities have been destroyed, there is no place for Nabokov's characters or for parody, and games or memory.

Kis is clearly attracted by the Nabokovian concept of writing as "a dream and an escape, a play of the spirit and the imagination, an act of culture par excellence," but he also detects something dubious and anachronistic in the master's "slightly frivolous fairy tales," especially when observed against the backdrop of Mandelstam's "bestial century."

Similarly, Kis admired Borges's use of intricate and paradoxical plot lines, and his use of real and fictitious documents as narrative shortcuts, but he was troubled by the fact that Borges gave one of his collections of short fiction the title *A Universal History of Infamy*, when in Kis's view it contained nothing but "children's stories with no social relevance whatsoever." "I claim that the universal history of infamy," he objected in an interview, "is the twentieth century and its camps—Soviet camps most of all." The real challenge, as he tried to demonstrate in *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich*, was to apply Borges's magic to tell the real story of the century.

Yet the notion of "improving" Borges or Nabokov by applying their techniques to more serious and more significant subjects misses the point, I think, of their whole literary endeavor. The great fabulators dazzle us with their storytelling—their labyrinths, their chess gambits, their lepidopteran patterns—precisely because their subject matter is as intriguing as it is morally equivocal and socially irrelevant. Nabokov made no secret about the essentially escapist nature of his art, and Borges referred to his fictions as "endless meditations on language and imagination." The Borgesian-Nabokovian tradition rests on the assumption that everything that exists outside the story should be purged from the mind of the writer and the mind of the reader. It certainly helps when the subject does not exert too much ontological pull of its own, when it has no claim to a life outside the text. (Nabokov willfully broke this rule, of course, and confounded generations of interpreters, by making a serious sexual transgression the subject of one of his charming fairy tales.)

Kis's effort to find a common ground between a formal literature that is a kind of tightrope act above the abyss and a moral literature that tries to "approach the flames" was unique and formidable. The tension of this double striving points towards a fundamental and unresolved dilemma in modern writing. Finally, though, Kis's work proved that the two ideals rarely blend into a homogenous whole. Kis's greatest literary gifts may have been those of a traditional wordsmith: a force of metaphor, a precision of description, and a lyrical ability to communicate the enchantment, the melancholy, and the terror of his characters—as in this passage from *Garden, Ashes*, when young Andreas wakes up at night and senses a shadow of death walk through his room:

> In the gloomy cowl of night and morning's semi-darkness, time congeals like milk, yet I innocently try to see through it. All I see is the immense silence of worm-eaten objects, things oppressed by their own nocturnal specific weight, the suspended bell-clapper in the heart of things that are weighted down by oblivion, that are practically nonexistent, that have been horribly and mercilessly reduced to specks and surrounded by a violet aureole.

This is literature born out of the "dark secret" of the soul, rather than from the need to be modern. The most self-consciously "modern" aspects of Kis's craft seem today the most anachronistic.

The events that served as the historical context of Kis's saga of the Sam family—the destruction of the Jewish community in and around Novi Sad in the Second

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World War, which is merely suggested in Kis's autobiographical novels—are also the subject of *The Book of Blam*, a novel by Aleksandar Tisma. Like Kis, Tisma is a Vojvodina native of Serb-Hungarian descent. (And like Kis, he is an "on and off" expatriate who presently lives in Canada.) The central episodes of Tisma's novel are the deportations of the Novi Sad Jews and the "Cold Days" massacre of January 1942, when Hungarian "Arrow Cross" troopers slaughtered some 1,400 Jewish and Serbian inhabitants of the city on the banks of the frozen Danube. When enough were killed, the rest were herded into the town's Cultural Center where, as Tisma writes in his novel, they were informed over the loudspeakers that they "had been found innocent and would therefore continue to enjoy their constitutional rights and were free to go home." These events are presented with brutal realism. It is hard to avoid the parallels with recent events in "the former Yugoslavia," as a multi-ethnic and seemingly civilized society rapidly collapses into suspicion and fear.

But the most intriguing part of Tisma's novel is the enigmatic, blurry, and not entirely likable figure of the title character. Miroslav Blam, a Jewish survivor from Novi Sad, walks the streets of his town sometime after the war, conducting imaginary conversations with the living and the dead, and trying to reconstruct in painstaking detail the mostly uneventful lives of the people long gone. He is tormented by nightmares in which he sees his own deformed body writhing behind a thick glass pane. He thinks about suicide, about removing himself for good from the lives of his wife Janja and their daughter the Little One.

Blam cannot decide between life and death, waking and dream. He is attracted and repulsed by both. Strolling along "the former Jew Street," towards a synagogue that was converted into a concert hall "because of its famous acoustics and absence of a congregation," Blam realizes that he "can't get at the present, he knows he can't, though he feels it, feels it bodily, on his skin, like the sporadic gusts of air from the boulevard that lash him and move on, carrying off group after group of people like those he has just seen." As he recounts his youth before and during the war, it becomes evident that his extreme dejection and his astounding passivity may be a deliberate mental strategy—a form of inner hibernation that helped Blam to survive by being barely there.

He rejects the love of a young cousin, a refugee from Austria, who wants him to run away with her to Italy, and instead he converts to Orthodox Christianity and marries a working-class woman who does not love him. When his quiet and bookish sister joins the Resistance and is killed in a shoot-out with the police, and when his parents are murdered in a pogrom, Blam takes a lowly clerical job and accepts the protection of a Serb collaborator, who becomes his wife's lover and possibly the father of his child. After the war, trapped in his vacuous life, carrying within him the pain of his departed friends and the pain of his personal disappointments, he becomes an unlikely custodian of the city's memory—a mirror of pure melancholy reflecting the shadows of its past.

Reading Kis and Tisma together, one is struck by the idea that these very different writers belong, after all, to the same cerebral, melancholy, skeptical, and cosmopolitan tradition of Yugoslav literature that has been pushed to the margins by the more populist, emotional, visceral, and ethnocentric writing that came to be identified with the "Balkan" sensibility. Kis and Tisma exemplify the sort of literature that restores the human complexity that nationalist cant always seeks to obliterate. Today, when so many Yugoslav writers are busy fabricating national myths, or keeping scores of ancient injuries, or lending their intellectual prestige to war criminals, those other voices provide some moral comfort, even if they come mostly from the peripheries or from the past. ■

The Bad Birds

By ALAN TAYLOR

Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier by James H. Merrell

(Norton, 463 pp., $27.95)

SHORTLY BEFORE DAWN on a snowy December 14, 1763, fifty armed and mounted Pennsylvania colonists approached the small Indian village at Conestoga. Despite the war raging on the colony's northern and western frontier, the local Indians slumbered in false security, for they had long submitted to the settler majority surrounding them. Rather than fight, the Conestoga Indians had surrendered almost all of their land, accepting a small reservation of a few hundred acres and occasional government handouts of food and clothing. They lived by raising hogs, hunting deer, tending their gardens, and making and peddling brooms and baskets to their settler neighbors.

In their ragged clothing, the Conestoga resembled poor colonists rather than the free and militant Indians dwelling farther up the Susquehanna River. But in the minds of the approaching vigilantes, known as the "Paxton Boys," the Conestoga were simply Indians, and all Indians were their enemies. Unable to come to grips with the frontier Indians, whose raids massacred farm families, the Paxton Boys turned their attention to the nearby sleeping Conestogas. Smashing open the cabin doors, the vigilantes quickly butchered the Indian families, then plundered and set ablaze their homes.

Later that day, colonists rummaging through the smoldering ashes and the scorched bones found a bag containing the Conestoga's most precious possessions: two wampum belts and six old documents, all produced at past treaty councils to certify the Indians' status as allies of Pennsylvania. The longest and oldest document was a cherished copy of the treaty made in 1701 with William Penn, the colony's Quaker founder. By the terms of that treaty, the Indians and the colonists pledged "that they shall forever hereafter be as one Head & One Heart, & live in true Friendship & Amity as one People."

In his provocative and eloquent book, James H. Merrell investigates the history framed between William Penn's optimistic treaty in 1701 and the bloody business at Conestoga in 1763. At first, Pennsylvania's colonists enjoyed unusually harmonious relations with their Indian neighbors, and long avoided the warfare that wracked (and nearly wrecked) the other British colonies founded in the seventeenth century. By the close of the 1760s, however, no other large colony had fewer Indians or a more remorseless settler determination to kill all the natives who lingered.

ALAN TAYLOR is the author of *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (Knopf).

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Merrell sets out to explain this tragic paradox, this passage from William Penn to the Paxton Boys. Why did the dream of becoming one people living in friendship fail so brutally?

IN ASKING THIS question, Merrell joins a line of inquiry that has recently become common among colonial scholars. They increasingly produce stories about how an early regime of mutual adjustment and mixed culture gave way as the colonists grew in power and asserted a rigid racial divide that exterminated, confined, or exiled the last of the natives. Richard White's *The Middle Ground* (1991) and Jill Lepore's *The Name of War* (1998) are especially influential examples of this work. But Merrell diverges from his peers by offering a more pessimistic reading of the early stages of the colonial encounter. From the beginning, he argues, any middle ground of mutual accommodation in Pennsylvania was little more than a dangerous illusion. Penn's treaty led inexorably to the Paxton Boys. "There was, after all, a deep fissure between Indian and colonial worlds," Merrell soberly concludes.

Merrell's grim view of the entire colonial encounter is particularly striking because he has been a leading proponent of the "new Indian history." Those who claim to be new insist that their predecessors, the "old Indian historians," told a simple story of continuous Indian decline to virtual annihilation; a story cast almost exclusively in military terms of heroic but futile confrontation; a story that assumed a fundamental incompatibility between the native and the colonial ways of life. Unable to adapt, the Indian leaders fought to the end. But the "new Indian historians" are dismayed by this military story of inevitable defeat; and they de-emphasize incompatibility and war in favor of a close attention to Indians' creative ability to adapt and to come to grips, often peacefully, with the invaders. By this new measure, a tribe's persistence as a distinct ethnic group becomes a cultural victory, despite its diminished numbers and the loss of its land.

In 1989, Merrell published *The Indians' New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal*, one of the finest and most influential works of the new Indian history. The Catawba Indians of the Carolinas suffered their share of the post-1492 catastrophes heaped upon native peoples: depopulation by devastating new diseases introduced from Europe; economic debilitation wrought by a dependence on new trade goods (especially alcohol); dispossession by a growing horde of new settlers; and the cultural intrusion of Christian missionaries determined to save Indian souls by altering their minds. Yet Merrell narrated the Catawba endurance through their travails as, fundamentally, a success story. He detailed their sufferings and their losses not to highlight the colonists' power, but to emphasize the Catawbas' achievement as survivors. By 1849, the Catawba had dwindled to about 110 persons living on a 630-acre reservation, but Merrell found a silver lining: they "lived out their lives in ways that, though by no means identical to those of a century or two before, were nonetheless their own."

A more consistently pessimistic tone pervades Merrell's new book. Indeed, by insisting that the seeds of native destruction were sown from the very start, this book could readily be taken for the old Indian history. Merrell finds no early alternative of cultural syncretism, no mixing of colonial ways and native ways that could have provided for a happier ending. In Pennsylvania, the Conestoga tried to play the Catawba role; they sought security by making themselves poor, obsequious, and useful to the invaders. For this they became easy victims, terminating their culture. In Pennsylvania, the only measure of safety for an Indian lay in warfare and flight westward. Merrell insists that the brutal conflict of the 1750s and 1760s was virtually inevitable, the ripening of a fundamental incompatibility, and a violent reckoning that could not be delayed indefinitely.

TO TELL THIS STORY, Merrell focuses on the "go-betweens" of the colonial relationship: on the very few men, Indians and colonists, who learned enough of the other culture to act as mediators, messengers, interpreters, and consultants. Although essential to the intercultural diplomacy of the colonial era, these intermediaries ordinarily lurk on the fringes of more conventional histories, which prefer to dwell on the top political and military leaders of the colonies and the tribes.

Only a few men possessed the qualities of a proper go-between: the courage, the toughness, the resourcefulness. The skilled intermediary preferred suasion to threat, smooth words to bullying. He needed a keen memory for past proceedings and a punctilious regard for, and mastery of, the metaphors and the gestures of Indian diplomacy: wiping the eyes and clearing the throats of the bereaved or weary; burying the hatchet to stem violence; delivering a wampum belt to close and to certify a speech; covering a grave with presents for grieving relatives. The go-between could readily and imaginatively dissemble without sacrificing a general reputation for trust. "Disguise and honesty were in constant tension," Merrell observes.

During the early eighteenth century, go-betweens worked primarily to keep the peace by containing the violence unleashed by the drunken murder of an Indian or a colonist by the other. News of a murder spawned alarming rumors of impending war, of a conspiracy by Indians to destroy the settlements, of a determination by the colonists to kill all natives. These alarms threatened to become self-fulfilling prophecies as frightened people lashed out in pre-emptive strikes. To stifle the momentum of rumor, Indian chiefs and colonial magistrates mobilized their intermediaries to seek each other out for reassurance. Together they ceremonially buried the murder by the delivery of gifts to the grieving relatives, assuring both sides that there would be no revenge killings.

Two intermediaries especially stand out in Merrell's cast, Shickellamy and Conrad Weiser. "Each in his own right a gifted woodsman, together—and they usually *were* together—they possessed unmatched skill, subtlety, and power." Shickellamy was an Oneida (one of the Iroquois Six Nations dwelling to the north in New York) who had been sent south to oversee Shamokin, a multi-ethnic Indian village on the Susquehanna River. The powerful Six Nations meant to dominate the diverse Pennsylvania Indians (a mix of Conestoga, Conoy, Mohican, Delaware, Shawnee, Tutelo, and various Iroquois). To that end, Shickellamy collaborated with Pennsylvania's leaders to keep the local Indians at peace, despite the occasional cross-cultural murder—and the gradual and provocative loss of their lands in one-sided bargains. Keeping the peace brought Shickellamy into frequent contact with Weiser, a German immigrant who had learned enough Indian protocol and language to make his living as a trader and land speculator, and as an interpreter and diplomat for the colony of Pennsylvania.

ALTHOUGH ROUGHLY compatible in their shared search for immediate accommodations, the go-betweens of the different sides were not similar men. Indian negotiators tended to be high-status, arrogant men, determined neither to emulate nor to know very much about the ways of the invaders. They clung to their own language and insisted that diplomacy must precisely follow Indian protocol, even when the business of a parlay was to dispossess natives of their lands. Owing to the limits on their knowledge, an Indian go-between usually needed a colonial interpreter, knowledgeable in Indian languages and protocol, to complete the

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connection. The colonial go-betweens, by contrast, were less proud and more practical, and learned more of the other side's ways and words; but these colonists were of lower status in their own society, largely because they spent so much grimy time in the woods and among the Indians. A colonial emissary "had a menial job and his own people's contempt."

At times, Merrell's focus on Pennsylvania's official intermediaries seems too narrow. By concentrating on the few individuals who were empowered or accepted by the colonial government for the delivery of formal messages, the book marginalizes the more numerous, if even less reputable, unofficial intermediaries. An array of traders and adventurers, Indian and colonist, women as well as men, regularly crossed the frontier to exchange goods, news, and propositions. Merrell dismisses the effectiveness of most groups with cross-cultural expertise: traders were too disreputable as cunning cheats and drunken womanizers; and missionaries were too pious for the equivocations and the sordid scenes of forest diplomacy; and Christianized Indians were too poor and too demoralized to enjoy respect or trust from either side. (And yet there were major exceptions to these carefully drawn exclusions.)

Moreover, the many irregular go-betweens played an important role in the cultural relationship, a role that warrants more attention. Much of what the Indians and the colonists knew about one another (or thought they knew) derived from more routine encounters at taverns, stores, and woodpaths. In the official discourse, these unregulated conversations appear as the central problem—as the songs of "bad Birds" spreading irresponsible alarm. Seeking power in the control of information, Iroquois chiefs and Pennsylvania officials collaborated to discredit all common newsbearers. In 1757, an Iroquois chief told the colonists not to "believe every old woman that comes down and brings you news." As alternative sources of information, however, the old women and the bad birds checked and challenged the power of the official go-betweens—who found their options constrained by what the other side already knew.

Instead of following the lead of the official discourse and dismissing the bad birds, Merrell might have located them at one end of a broad spectrum of contacts that collectively generated the web of information and misinformation that shaped the bicultural relationship. Given how frequently some of these unofficial men appear in passing, one wishes that they had received the same careful analysis that Merrell so fruitfully applies to the official few. For nobody told a greater lie than the official go-between who insisted that he alone, as the formal representative of a colony or tribe, could be trusted to tell the truth.

In fact, given that the bad birds usually warned of colonial chicanery and Indian attacks, in the end they told a truer story than did the official intermediaries—who spoke smoothly and duplicitously of enduring friendship. In 1758, the officials assured the Indians that, if they deserted the French cause, the advancing English and colonial army would destroy Fort Duquesne in western Pennsylvania and then withdraw eastward. Bad birds warned the Indians that the promise was a lie. Heeding their hopes rather than their fears, the Indians deserted the French, allowing the fort to fall. Of course, the English and the colonists stayed, rebuilt and renamed the fort, and invited a steady stream of settlers who drove out the remaining Indians. The natives should have heeded the bad birds and the old women.

Sometimes Merrell confines his analysis too narrowly within the bounds of Pennsylvania—a foreshortening of an Indian diplomacy that, in fact, extended deep into the neighboring colonies and far beyond them to the north and west. Other polities—the Six Nations, the French, New York, Virginia, and the larger British empire—appear in passing, without a full explanation of the conflict between their goals and those of Pennsylvania. The focus on one colony sometimes creates a skewed perspective where relatively obscure Pennsylvanians, such as Conrad Weiser, loom larger than major imperial players like Sir William Johnson, the Crown's superintendent of Indian affairs, who had the misfortune to dwell in nearby New York (but who exercised great influence, through the Six Nations, in Pennsylvania).

Determined to tell a Pennsylvanian story, Merrell neglects the larger context of imperial contest between the British and the French for mastery over the native peoples and their lands. The French appear as a vague, external menace rather than as equal participants in an overlapping and contested discourse of power within Pennsylvania. In 1755, an Oneida chief rebuked the Pennsylvanians for miserliness by invoking the French contrast: "They never employ an Indian on any Business, but they give him fine Cloathes, besides other Presents, and this makes the Indians their hearty Friends." Was he right? Attention to the French go-betweens in western Pennsylvania would have provided an invaluable standard for comparison.

Yet Merrell's book more than compen-

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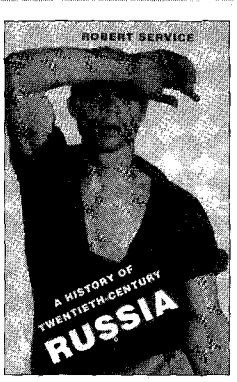

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sates for its narrowness with a deep analysis of the words and deeds of the official intermediaries. He brilliantly teases rich ideas out of difficult documents, each layered with complexity, evasion, and confusion. Very few Indians were literate, and so almost all the surviving documents were produced by colonial writers for colonial readers who shared their prejudices. In the voluminous records of their councils held to negotiate with Indians, the colonists did include translated transcriptions of lengthy speeches by leading Indians; but Merrell demonstrates that the public council records were carefully and selectively crafted to minimize Indian expressions of discontent and to maximize the apparent mastery of the colonial participants. Moreover, Indian and European languages differed radically, and much was lost in the translation. "Intercultural communication was plagued by ignorance and folly, fraud and mistrust, cupidity and arrogance; indeed, as time wore on, the interference got worse rather than better." The marvel is that Merrell, by careful and critical winnowing, succeeds in drawing a fascinating and coherent story out of such treacherous sources.

MERRELL VIVIDLY TAKES his readers deep into a harsh, demanding, and often violent land. No romantic, Merrell refers to "the frontier, where chaos was king," a borderland of "endemic confusion and contention." To reach an Indian village required long, hard travel along narrow, crooked paths through briars, thorns, and swamps, across raging rivers and over stony ridges, all the while swatting mosquitoes in summer, suffering frostbite in winter, and battling hunger in all seasons. And arrival did not always end the ordeal for the colonists, whose expectations of diet, cleanliness, and quiet usually jarred with the dirt, the vermin, the indigence, and the din of a native village. If a trader had recently introduced a keg of rum, the frolic could roil a village in deadly, disturbing violence. For their part, Indians who reached Philadelphia found the crowds distressing, the inhabitants rude, mean, and stingy, and the pathogens deadly. In 1749, twenty unlucky Oneida died of smallpox during their brief visit to that city.

Instead of mixing the two cultures, Indian and colonial, the development of a small cadre of go-betweens permitted the great majority of Indians and colonists to persist in their cherished difference from one another. In 1745, Shickellamy warned a missionary to back off: "We are Indians and don't wish to be transformed into white men. The English are our Brethren, but we never promised to become what they are." Both colonists and Indians left to a few experts the distasteful business of dealing with the other to keep the peace.

Nor did the go-betweens themselves converge in their beliefs and their expectations to create a shared understanding. Quite the contrary. Familiarity with the Other only deepened the conviction of the superiority of one's own people. In contrast to other historians, who emphasize the bicultural nature of frontier intermediaries, Merrell insists that, with a single exception in a tragic figure named Andrew Montour, the go-betweens remained firmly rooted in one culture and not the other. "While all sought harmony, while they played up similarities, they could not, they did not want to, erase the differences they saw between colonist and Indian." Although Weiser had Indian friends and was adopted into one of their tribes, he never thought of himself as an Indian in any sense. Indeed, over time he grew increasingly contemptuous of native beliefs and ever readier to manipulate Indians to enrich himself with their land.

The reliance on a few official go-betweens became especially detrimental to the Indians, as they lagged ever farther behind the colonists in numbers and power. Few Indians understood much English, and almost none could read or write, and so they became increasingly vulnerable to deception and manipulation by colonial interpreters, who distorted their words and forged documents for their signature. Often what the Indians took to be a statement of mutual friendship turned out to be a deed passing their lands to some colonists, including the interpreter. As the proponents of a gradual and peaceful process of parting Indians from their lands, though, Weiser and the other colonial go-betweens compared well with the genocidal Paxton Boys. And yet their ends were largely the same. As Merrell explains, "Weiser and other colonial mediators, never shedding prejudices that Europeans brought to America, embraced the idea that getting along with Indians was only a necessary step on the road to a brighter future, a time when those Indians would follow the forest into oblivion."

Even the shared hardships and dangers of frontier journeys tended to divide the colonial and Indian go-betweens. Indians cast the colonial travelers as obtuse bunglers and chronic complainers who disturbed the forest spirits and coveted native lands. Colonial go-betweens increasingly dismissed their Indian guides as naïve and superstitious, overgrown children given, in Weiser's words, to "silly fancies about spirits, about their dreams, and their sorceries." "As it turned out," Merrell observes, "the greatest obstacles in the way of intercultural understanding were not swollen streams, steep hills, or rotten weather but deeply-rooted perceptions that passage through the woods exposed rather than effaced."

Merrell masterfully evokes the clashing cultures' discordant ways of marking and perceiving the landscape. The Indians filled their forest with emblems of victories and markers of loss: trees carved with pictographs; abandoned villages; skulls on posts. They sensed that the land was filled with a spiritual power that had to be propitiated and conversed with for safe passage. Despite the discomforts and the dangers of the forest, a journey beyond it and into the colonial towns unnerved Indians. The settled landscape of cleared and ploughed fields, of building-clogged towns, was eerily mute, disenchanted of its spirits and rendered strange by the obliteration of Indian monuments. For their part, the colonists treated the forest as just so much inert matter, a set of obstacles that would be cleared away for their ease and profit, as they had already done around Philadelphia.

The colonists and the Indians discovered that they had fundamentally antithetical visions of Pennsylvania's future. Indians hoped to remain Indians—politically autonomous, culturally distinct, militarily powerful, and secure in their mastery over most of the landscape. Colonists eagerly anticipated dispossessing the Indians and reaping profits from the sale and cultivation of a forest remade into real estate. Colonists grew in arrogance, and Indians grew in alarm, as both noted the swelling colonial population that threatened to overwhelm the dwindling number of natives. From 20,000 in 1701, Pennsylvania's population doubled by 1740, and doubled again by 1760.

THE CONFLICT, AS Merrell portrays it, was not at all a matter of misunderstanding. Indeed, the warfare of the 1750s and 1760s resulted from the improved understanding by each side of the other. As they learned more about one another, as the differences and the threats became clearer, it hardened their hearts, making atrocities easier to inflict. Colonists concluded that Indians could not be converted until they had been conquered. Indians recognized that the colonists came to conquer and not to coexist. Familiarity bred contempt, which provoked war.

After 1754, Pennsylvania's go-betweens operated in a land drenched in the blood of men, women, and children, as the battle lines hardened and merciless war became the norm rather than the exception. The primary business of the go-between became the desperate, and usually futile, effort to restore contact and comity. When they did succeed, peace came at an unex-

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pectedly high price for the Indians, as they had to make reparations in the form of sweeping concessions of land to the colonial victors. The colonial go-betweens, who had once kept the peace by delivering presents to Indians, now became masters at manipulating the natives out of their remaining lands, plying their skills to bribe, cajole, deceive, and intimidate. "Intended to bring people together, treaties ended up driving them apart," Merrell writes. Worse still for the Indians, the cessions bought them no peace, for during the 1760s the Paxton Boys and their ilk routinely killed any Indian, no matter how peaceable, who ventured near the colonial settlements. Pennsylvania had become a white man's country.

IN VICTORY PENNSYLVANIA offered no place for Andrew Montour, the one figure in this story who, for a time, suggested the possibility of a different ending of cultural fusion. Among the go-betweens, he alone fell in the middle. He was the son of an Oneida Chief and a Canadian mixed-blood. Truly bicultural and multilingual, Andrew Montour became the preeminent interpreter at Pennsylvania's Indian councils during the mid-eighteenth century. To their great frustration, neither colonial authorities nor Indian chiefs could succeed in racially categorizing Montour by the cues of his dress, his language, or his manner. He commonly wore both European clothing and Indian face paint. In the short term, the blurring gave Montour a measure of influence in both worlds; but in the long term the uncertainty about his identity rendered him suspect to everybody. There were too few Montours to create in Pennsylvania the sort of *métis* (mixed blood) community that emerged in Canada, where intermarriage was far more common.

When Andrew Montour proposed his own mixed settlement of colonial tenants and Indian landlords, the leaders of both Pennsylvania and the Iroquois recoiled in horror—and combined to stifle the scheme. The Indian chiefs wanted mixture no more than the rulers of Pennsylvania. Merrell concludes that "America was to be a land of lines dividing Indians from Europeans, not a place where lines blurred and people came together." Betrayed by his former colonial employers, Montour lapsed into heavy drinking and disarray in his last years. In 1772, he was murdered by an Indian. As Merrell grimly explains, "Trying to be both Indian and European, Montour ended up being neither. The life that he made for himself, the path he traveled, turned out to be a dead end in English America, not an avenue to some new social order." ■

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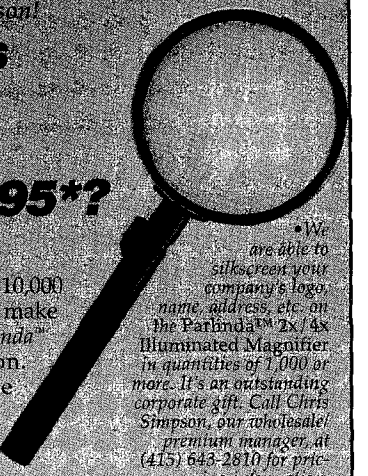

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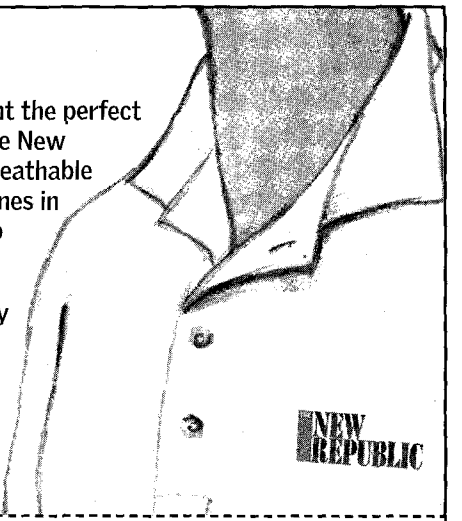

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Lost Horizon

EVERYONE IS COMPARING the sudden accidental death of John F. Kennedy Jr., his wife, Carolyn Bessette, and his sister-in-law Lauren Bessette, to the sudden accidental death of Princess Diana only two years ago. And, to a certain superficial extent, the analogy holds. These two beloved and beautiful international celebrities were both cut down in the prime of life, setting off a universal and spontaneous outpouring of public grief—not to mention wall-to-wall media coverage. Yet, in a very important sense, these deaths are quite different, because the lives of JFK Jr. and Diana—and hence the nature of each one's purchase on public sentiment—were so dissimilar. The masses loved Diana in part for her well-publicized charitable works but even more, I think, as a function of compassion—as her princesshood wore on, her role, increasingly, was that of victim. Diana's enormous wealth and privilege seemed not to matter next to the facts that she was cheated on by her husband, that she suffered from depression and eating disorders, and that her privacy was systematically invaded by paparazzi—right up to the moment that the speeding car she was riding in began careening toward disaster. In the age of Oprah, Diana's lonely struggle with the forces arrayed against her resonated powerfully within the hearts of a public conditioned to respond to such a story. The tears that flowed at her passing flowed not only because her life had been so short but also, people believed, because it had been so painful.

JFK JR. WAS ANYTHING BUT SUCH A figure. To be sure, he first entered the national imagination as the victimized little boy, so heartbreakingly saluting the casket of his murdered father. But he didn't live that way. By all accounts, he embraced life and lived it with a candid kind of élan, neither succumbing to the vices that consumed too many of his cousins nor ever evincing bitterness at the cruel way in which death prematurely snatched first his father, then his mother. Yes, it was very often a hassle to be John-John—photographers trailed after him, too. But you never got the sense that it was a burden to be who he was. Even after flunking the bar exam—twice—he didn't make excuses or get sour with the press. Whereas Diana cowered in the strobe lights, and Alec Baldwin would haul off and slug an intrusive photographer, JFK Jr., schooled by his mother in the handling of such matters, reached a kind of negotiated settlement. He would let the photogs go about their business as long as they, after a reasonable time, would let him go about his. He spoke of himself as "fortunate." And he truly was—until he made the decision to pilot his small plane in difficult weather conditions over the inky waters off the coast of his father's home state.

I HAVE MY OWN REASONS TO BE transfixed, and moved, by the story of JFK Jr.'s death. The untimely death of yet another Kennedy prompted me to reflect on the links between my own interest in politics and government and the long-running Kennedy family saga. It's hardly a matter of ideology: it's been a long time since I automatically agreed with anything that Ted Kennedy or the younger generation of Kennedy politicos had to say about a public policy issue. Still, the Kennedys are a large part of the reason I even think of myself as a liberal and a Democrat at all anymore. I got my politics from my father, and he, to a large extent, got his from the Kennedys. In the 1960s, their vision of a liberalism that could be both muscular and humane inspired him. So much so that, in 1968, he put his legal career on hold to work full-time on Bobby's presidential campaign; for many years, a picture of RFK—signed "with thanks" by Ethel Kennedy—hung in Dad's study at home. On the day Bobby was shot in Los Angeles, my father was in Nebraska, working on the successful Kennedy effort to win that state's primary. He flew home, and we all kept a kind of a vigil in front of the television—hoping against hope that the news would never come that Sirhan Sirhan's bullet had achieved its purpose. I was six years old. But I still vividly remember how my older sister and I took some red, white, and blue campaign banners emblazoned with the name "Kennedy" and stood by the curb in front of our house, waving the little flags at passing cars, as if this gesture would somehow revive our father's fallen hero. When the bad news did come, and the TV screen showed RFK's coffin being delivered back to Washington, Dad fell to his knees in front of the black-and-white set and wept, which was the first time I ever saw him cry.

JFK JR. HAD HUNDREDS OF FRIENDS; I can't claim to have been one of them. Nevertheless, in a way that's difficult to describe, I found him the most familiar superstar of my generation. We were almost the same age, and, ever since my college years, I have felt oddly aware of JFK Jr.'s presence, as if he were hovering over the horizon of my own peer group, just seven degrees of separation away. The space between the decidedly parallel lines of our lives narrowed when he became editor and publisher of *George* and joined the ranks of journalism. As a consequence, a number of friends and colleagues have been directly affected by this loss, and the knowledge of their sadness increases my own.

I ONLY MET JFK JR. ONCE. IT WAS three months ago, at *Vanity Fair*'s gigantic outdoor cocktail party after the annual White House Correspondents' Association dinner in Washington. He was standing on the lawn, sipping what looked like a heavily diluted whiskey, and talking with a new writer for *George*. The writer was a friend of mine; he motioned for me to join in and then did the introductions. The three of us made small talk for about ten minutes; only a few things about the conversation stand out in my memory. I remember thinking that it was nice of him to spend time getting to know one of his writers when he could have been hobnobbing with the Hollywood types hanging around a few yards away. I remember that, as I listened to him speak, I thought I perceived a faint similarity between his voice and that of his father. Not the accent, of course, but something about the timbre, or the way he put spaces between certain words. And I remember that he was, as advertised, astonishingly handsome. As we spoke, my wife approached from behind Kennedy, calling out to me that it was time for us to hurry up and go home. "Honey, this is John Kennedy," I said, gently turning her so that she could see who I was talking with. The discussion of bolting the party ceased.

THE NEXT DAY, OF COURSE, I BOASTED about this brief encounter to anyone that I could get to listen. When people asked me what the man was like, I gave the same answer that apparently everyone else who met John F. Kennedy Jr. did: "He was a perfectly normal, decent, nice guy." This is not a "legacy." But, considering all the circumstances under which he was obliged to grow up, given all the forces that could have tugged him in a much darker direction, this near-universal assessment of the man qualifies as an achievement. Now, alas, it could also serve as his epitaph.

CHARLES LANE

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